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OF THE
COURT OF LONDON



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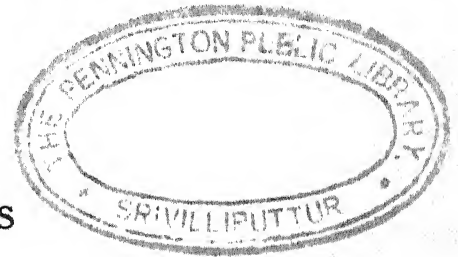
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THE
Mysteries
OF THE
Court of London

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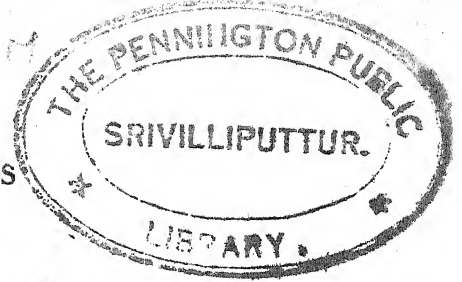
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THIRD SERIES

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Court of London

 VOLUME XIII.

CHAPTER CXXXII.

THE WARFARE OF DUPLICITIES.

It will be remembered that the Count de St. Gerard had taken his leave of Adelaide with an intimation that he purposed to adopt some measures to procure the release of her husband Lord Saxondale; and we must now observe that she did not entertain the slightest intention of frustrating this design, nor of recommending Henri to abandon it. She was, as already stated, that all hope of winning the French nobleman to her arms must be renounced and she was therefore desirous, for several reasons, to have her husband restored to her. Towards Lady Saxondale she was playing a very deep game; and it was entirely on the principle of "diamond cut diamond." The threat of a suit being instituted in the Ecclesiastical Courts to dissolve the marriage, had not been lost upon her; and she knew full well that if the marriage should once receive the express sanction of Edmund's mother and guardians, that suit could *not* be entered upon. Now, if a written acknowledgment from Lord Petersfield, guaranteeing the payment of an allowance were obtained by Lady Saxondale's intervention,—the proceeding would be tantamount to such express sanction of the alliance. This was therefore what the wily Adelaide was aiming at when she accepted the terms proposed by Lady Saxondale.

She was desirous, we have said that her husband should be restored to her for several reasons. In the first place, she wanted a companion: and it suited her well enough to have one whom she could render altogether submissive to her will. In the second place, she looked forward to the time when Edmund would be of age to enter upon the unrestricted control of his estates and fortune. In the meanwhile she would be strengthening her ascendancy over him: she would rule him by a judicious admixture of terrorism and syren blandishments;—and thus, when his twenty-first birthday was passed, she would enter upon the virtual sway of the broad domains, stately mansions, and vast revenues attached to the proud name of Saxondale. Her calculations descended to the minutest details; and the following was a part of her reasoning:—

"Edmund has been consigned to a madhouse on the pretext that he must have been insane to contract an alliance with me. But if he be emancipated from the asylum how can he possibly be transferred thither again on the same plea, when the marriage will in the meantime have been sanctioned by the written document to be produced by his own mother from his principal guardian? Or again, if any attempt were made to capture his person once more, we would be upon our guard to offer resistance, and have succour constantly at hand or we might retire to Italy or some

other continental clime—anywhere but France,—and thus remain abroad until the period of Edmund's minority be at an end. And then, when once he enters upon the control of his property, his haughty mother shall indeed be reduced to a cipher; and I will avenge myself upon her who sought to trample me under foot!"

The reader may now fully comprehend the nature of that policy which was the basis of Adelaide's proceedings, and why she had so readily given an assent to Lady Saxondale's proposals. She fancied that Lady Saxondale was completely her dupe, and that her own ulterior designs were not suspected by her ladyship, inasmuch as they altogether turned upon the pivot of Edmund's contemplated release; and Adelaide hugged the idea that Lady Saxondale would be very far from supposing that such a proceeding had been thought of, or would be attempted. But, as will presently appear, it was a complete warfare of duplicities and hypocrisies, dissimulations and treacheries, which these two women were thus secretly waging against each other. Lady Saxondale knew full well that it was to Adelaide's interest to procure the liberation of Edmund: while, on the other hand, it was entirely to her ladyship's own interest that Edmund should remain in the asylum as a lunatic,—because on this ground the requisite legal proceedings could alone be taken to perpetuate the control of the property in her hands. The guardians would recommend the mother and not the wife as the most proper person to exercise this control: and indeed Lady Saxondale's plans were so well arranged, that if she could only keep Edmund locked up, she felt confident of success. At the same time we must here observe that although she knew it was to Adelaide's interest to have Edmund set free, she had at present no reason to suspect that a plot was already in existence to accomplish that end.

On retiring to her own chamber after that conversation with Adelaide which was described in the preceding chapter, Lady Saxondale learnt from her maid that a foreign gentleman who gave no name, had that afternoon called upon Adelaide, and that he remained a considerable time. Her ladyship instantaneously suspected that this must be a paramour—and very likely the Count de St. Gerard himself; for Lady Saxondale was fully conversant with all the

particulars of Adelaide's previous history. This was therefore an important discovery for her. If she could only detect her daughter-in-law in carrying on an adulterous intrigue, it would place her so completely in her power that she could reduce her to any terms and crush her into the completest submission. I naturally struck the wily Lady Saxondale that before Adelaide departed for Lincolnshire, she would communicate either personally or by note with this foreigner; and she resolved not only to have Adelaide's movements watched but likewise to intercept any letter she might send out to the post. She accordingly gave her maid certain instructions and by means of a handsome bribe induced her to undertake the task now assigned her.

On the following day Lady Saxondale procured from Lord Petersfield such a document as Adelaide had stipulated for. She represented to his lordship that inasmuch as it would be impossible to carry out a suit for the dissolution of the marriage, in the absence of a positive proof that Edmund had really been seduced, inveigled and beguiled by Adelaide into that match, it would be better to make the best of a bad business and afford the wife sufficient means to maintain herself respectably. By pretending deferentially to consult Lord Petersfield, instead of to dictate her own will—and by otherwise flattering his vanity—Lady Saxondale procured the paper which she desired; and on returning to the mansion in Park Lane she placed it in Adelaide's hands.

Edmund's wife had already made arrangements for her departure into Lincolnshire; and she fully purposed to proceed thither,—having resolved to dissemble her hopes and aims until her husband should be restored to her, so that no suspicion might be excited as to the existence of a plot for his liberation. When in possession of the document, which was precisely in accordance with her own views, she sat down in her chamber, and penned the following letter in the French language, but a translation of which we lay before our readers:—

"Circumstances induce me to depart immediately for Saxondale Castle in Lincolnshire. Lady Saxondale has returned; and it will therefore be better that I should thus at once absent myself from the metropolis—as in that case no suspicion can possibly arise of

the project entertained for my husband's liberation. I need not conjure you to leave no measure unadopted to ensure this end: I know that you will keep your word. When Edmund is free, let him set off at once and join me at the Castle: urge him to do this—tell him that from a conversation which I have had with his mother, it is of the most vital consequence to his interests that we should meet without delay.

“ADELAIDE.”

Having sealed this letter and addressed it to the Count de St. Gerard at the hotel where he was staying Adelaide gave it to her own maid (the one who had accompanied her from Paris) with instructions that it should be immediately sent to the post. The maid, on descending the stairs perceived several letters lying on the hall-table, and which were likewise left there to be forwarded to the post. Accordingly, to save herself trouble, she placed amongst them the one which Adelaide had just given her. Lady Saxondale's maid was upon the watch; and within a very few minutes that particular letter was in the hands of her mistress.

Lady Saxondale, on at once perceiving that it was addressed to the Count de St. Gerard, was seized with the exultant hope that she now held in her possession the damning proof of Adelaide's infidelity to her husband. She opened it very cautiously, in case there should be a necessity to seal it again and transmit it to the Count instead of retaining it in her own hands: and well was it that she took this precaution: for its contents afforded no such evidence as Edmund's mother had hoped to acquire. But it was scarcely of less importance: for it revealed to Lady Saxondale the existence of some concerted plan, having for its object the emancipation of her son. It by no means suited her purpose to intercept this letter altogether; as by so doing, Adelaide might suspect by whose means it had been prevented from reaching him for whom it was intended:—and such an occurrence might lead to an open rupture between Lady Saxondale and her daughter-in-law. She therefore secured the letter again with the utmost carefulness; and her maid restored it to the pile lying on the hall table to be forwarded to the post.

Early on the following morning Adelaide took her departure into Lincolnshire. One of the travelling-carriages was placed at her disposal: she was accompanied by her own maid and attended by a footman who was assigned for this service. Thus Lady Saxondale made every arrangement that might lead Adelaide to suppose her desirous of maintaining as friendly a demeanour as could possibly subsist between the two under such circumstances;—and indeed, from the moment of the reading of the letter, there was nothing in Lady Saxondale's manner to indicate that she had discovered aught of Adelaide's intentions with respect to the liberation of her husband.

But no sooner had the equipage rolled away from Park Lane, than Lady Saxondale ordered another carriage to be gotten in readiness—and drove at once to the office of Messrs. Marlow and Malton in Parliament Street. Mr. Marlow was in his private room, and thither her ladyship was forthwith conducted.

“I have called, my dear sir,” she said, after an exchange of the usual compliments, “to inform you that Edmund must be removed to another asylum with the least possible delay.”

“Indeed!” ejaculated the lawyer, looking slightly vexed at this announcement for, as already stated, Dr. Burdett was related to him by marriage—and he had expected that his kinsman would reap the full benefit of Lord Saxondale's alleged lunacy. “I hope your ladyship has heard nothing to render you dissatisfied.”

“With Dr. Burdett? No—certainly not interrupted the lawyer's client. “But I have received positive information—no matter how—that a plot is in existence for my son's liberation; and the only way to defeat it, will be to remove him, under circumstances of the utmost secrecy, to another asylum. But the choice of such asylum may be left to the discretion of Dr. Burdett himself: he shall be entrusted with all the requisite arrangements; and the quarterly payments for the support of my unfortunate son, can be effected through the doctor's hands. In a word, Mr. Marlow, we will leave Dr. Burdett in his position as custodian of my son,—merely stipulating that the happy young man is to be transferred to another place.”

“To be sure, to be sure,” said the volatile Marlow, to whom this proposition on his kinsman's behalf was agreeable enough. “I will see about the

matter in the course of the day. Indeed, I will lose no time; and Burdett shall be equally prompt in making the requisite arrangements. If your ladyship will leave it all to us, I will guarantee that everything shall be completed to your satisfaction within forty-eight hours."

"Forty-eight hours!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale; "it may be too late. During the interval the treacherous plot which is in progress, might be carried out. It is now only eleven o'clock—still early in the forenoon," continued Lady Saxondale, after consulting her watch. "I beseech you, Mr. Marlow, to repair to Hammersmith at once, and see Dr. Burdett. He is sure to be acquainted with some other physician who will receive my unfortunate son; and let the removal take place during the night. I rely upon your promptitude in this matter: for, as you perceive, it is really and truly of the highest importance."

"Then I will at once take it in hand," said Mr. Marlow: and satisfied with this assurance, Lady Saxondale departed.

CHAPTER CXXXIII.

THE SIGN OF "THE THREE CADGERS."

THE reader will recollect that we left Chiffin the Cannibal at the moment that he had effected his escape from the Liverpool constables. When having time and opportunity for mature reflection, the villain deliberated what course he should pursue. It was absolutely necessary that he should take his departure by some means or another for the United States,—not merely to obtain possession of the money which the Marquis of Eagledean had promised to remit thither for his use—but likewise because he found that his native land was getting too hot to hold him. All prospect of being enabled to take his passage in a ship from Liverpool was now put out of the question; and he resolved, after well weighing the position of his affairs, to take a bold step as the best and the only means of accomplishing his object. This was to return to London, and get on board some vessel bound from the Thames for the New World.

"It's pretty sure," he said to himself, "that those who got on my scent at Liverpool, had heard of my having made inquiries about the sailing of the

American ships; and it's also pretty sure that they will send up to London to let the authorities there know that they precious nearly caught me, and that I am lurking about in the hope of getting out of the country. So communications will then be sent off to all the sea-ports to keep a sharp look out; and it will never enter their heads that I should be bold enough to go back again to London. Therefore that's the very thing I will do: for, after all, London is the place to hide one's self in."

These reflections were made at a distance of a few miles from Liverpool; and no sooner was the daring conclusion arrived at, than Chiffin began to retrace his way towards the metropolis. In about half-an-hour he reached a railway station, where a Parliamentary train, proceeding southward, had just stopped. The Cannibal,—excited by his recent exploits at Liverpool, as well as by some liquor of which he had just been partaking at a wayside alehouse,—was emboldened to seek any adventure which might further his views. He accordingly paid his fare, and took his place as a third-class passenger; and on the following day was set down within few miles of the British metropolis. He roamed about in the fields and rested himself in ale-houses until the dusk was setting in; and then made his way towards the nearest suburb of London. This was Hammersmith,—on entering which, Chiffin bethought himself of a low boozing-ken wherewith he was well acquainted in that neighbourhood and on the land-lord of which he could confidently rely, no matter what amount of reward might be offered for his apprehension. For this landlord, by making his establishment a receiving-house for the plunder of the thieves who frequented it, amassed large profits; and, at the same time, he was too much in the power of his customers to betray any one of them,—inasmuch as they would make common cause to avenge such an act of treachery. Here, therefore Chiffin knew he would be safe; and being much wearied with his day's wanderings, he resolved to pass the night at the sign of the *Three Gadgers*—for such was the elegant appellation of the boozing-ken.

It was shortly after nine o'clock that the Cannibal entered this place where he received a cordial welcome from the landlord; and passing into the tap room, he ordered a good supper and

plenty of liquor to be served up. Three or four other individuals, of the same stamp as Chiffin himself, and with whom he was acquainted, were regaling themselves there. They were characters of the most lawless and desperate description; and entertaining a high admiration for the Cannibal, they gave him a welcome as friendly as that which he had already experienced from the landlord.

While they were seated in the enjoyment of the various comestibles they respectively fancied, two gentlemen entered the room. One was of exceedingly handsome appearance and elegant apparel; and his mien denoted the foreigner. The other was of middle age—also well dressed—and was evidently an Englishman. The foreigner appeared to shrink back for a moment from the mean and dirty aspect of the place, the cloud of tobacco smoke which filled it, and the ill-looking fellows who were regaling themselves there: but it was merely with a sense of loathing, and not of alarm, that the Frenchman—for such he was—thus momentarily recoiled.

"Go on, St. Gerard," whispered his English companion, speaking rapidly in the French tongue: "it is here that you will find the instruments you seek."

"Your knowledge of London life, my dear Lawson," replied the Count with a smile, "does indeed extend to the most extraordinary places."

"I told you so when you communicated your wishes to me," returned Mr. Lawson, as he and his companion seated themselves at a hitherto unoccupied table: then instantaneously going on to speak in louder voice, and likewise in the English tongue—so as to be both heard and comprehended by the men who were smoking and drinking there—he said, "My dear fellow, as you understand a little of my vernacular, we will discourse there-in. You want to see London life in all its phases; and here is one of those public-houses where your desire may to a certain extent be gratified. Here, waiter!" added Mr. Lawson, turning to a dirty pot-boy who was looking for orders: "bring in half-a-dozen of wine and glasses enough for the whole company. These good fellows here shall drink with us."

Thus speaking, Mr. Lawson threw down a five-pound note; and the dirty

pot-boy, after staring at the two gentlemen with mingled astonishment and admiration for nearly a minute left the room to execute the bounteous order he had received. At first Chiffin the Cannibal and the other men present—none of whom had very clear consciences—experienced some degree of uneasiness at the entrance of the two gentlemen, whose visit they naturally concluded to be some stratagem of the police: but the observations purposely made by Mr. Lawson disabused them of the idea—and the order for the wine convinced them that no treachery was intended. But Chiffin whispered to the friend seated next to him, "These swell coves pretend to come here to see a bit of London life. I wouldn't mind betting five guineas to as many brass farthings, that they have got some little business in hand which waits such chaps as you and me to help them in;—and so I'll give 'em a hint presently."

The wine was brought, and when the change for the five-pound note was given to Mr. Lawson, he tossed the pot-boy a couple of half-crowns for himself,—thereby establishing a fresh claim upon the admiration and gratitude of this individual.

"Now, my friends," said Mr. Lawson, thus familiarly addressing the ruffians seated around,—“take a glass of wine with us, by way of showing you are not vexed at what may seem an intrusion on our part upon a region so exclusively your own. The fact is, my companion is a French gentleman of fortune, who wishes to see something of London life in all its phases; and as I happen to be tolerably familiar with the lowest as well as the highest resorts of the metropolis, I have undertaken to be his guide."

"And very proper too, sir," answered Chiffin. "Here's your health; gentlemen. There's worse wine at other places than the '*Three Gadgers*'; and there's more unlikely cribs, too, than this one to look out for chaps when they are wanted to do a little business of a private or delicate nature."

"What do you mean, my good fellow?" asked Mr. Lawson, on whom Chiffin had bestowed a knowing wink as he delivered the concluding part of his speech.

"I mean exactly what I say, sir," responded the Cannibal; "and if you like to take me at my word, do so. Lord bless yer, I know London as well as you

do, sir; and I know too that there's many chaps with good coats on their backs, and a many ladies which flaunt in silks and satins, that stands in need at times of the assistance of such coarse-looking chaps as me and my pals here. If it wasn't so, I'm sure I don't know what would become on us. Do you, Jack?" he asked, turning to the individual seated next to him.

"No—that I don't" was the answer.

"You are uncommon sharp fellows," observed Mr. Lawson, with a laugh.

"Well, the fact is I and my companion here do want a little business done."

"I guessed as much, sir," answered the Cannibal. "Speak out."

"Would it not be better, my good fellow," rejoined Lawson. "if you were to adjourn with me and my friend to another room to talk the matter over?"

"Well, just as you like, sir. Come—this way:" and rising as he spoke, the Cannibal approached the door.

"As we take your friend away from you," said Lawson, again addressing the other men, "we leave you the wine as a recompense; and I will also give the landlord orders to bring you in presently a couple of crown bowls of punch."

These announcements were received with much satisfaction; and Chiffin, having procured a candle from the bar, conducted Mr. Lawson and the Count de St. Gerard to a room upstairs, where they all three seated themselves in a business-like manner.

"Now my good friend," said Mr. Lawson. "I will endeavour to explain myself in a few words. I need not ask whether you are the man who will like to earn fifty guineas or so?—for you have something so pleasant and agreeable in your looks that they bespeak a readiness to render any sort of service, no matter of what nature, so long as it's well paid."

"I don't know about the looks, sir," observed Chiffin, with a grim smile; "but as for my character, you've hit it off as nice as if you and me had been brought up together from our infancy. And now, tell us what the game is, sir."

"In the first place, as a necessary preliminary," remarked Mr. Lawson, "give us some name whereby to address you. I dare say you have a dozen cut and dried for use as various circumstances may suggest. Tell us any one of them."

"Well, sir, Brown is an uncommon good name," replied Chiffin: "and so with your leave I will be Brown in the present business."

"Good, friend Brown," answered Lawson. "And now for the explanations. You must know that at a little distance hence there is a lunatic asylum kept by a certain Dr. Burdett. This you can promptly find out, if you do not already know where it is. Within its walls a young gentleman—or rather a young nobleman—is confined; and it suits our purpose that he should be emancipated with the least possible delay. Do you think this can be done?"

"Can a house be broke into?" asked Chiffin, with knowing significance: "and he who breaks in, can take another person out with him. That's English I believe, sir."

"And very capital English too, friend Brown," rejoined Mr. Lawson. "But as a matter of course, there is a great deal to be done in the present business. When I tell you who the young nobleman is, you will have to ascertain by some means or another in which part of the building he is confined. Do you think you can manage this?"

"Servants are to be bribed, sir," responded Chiffin, "where there is gold to bribe'em."

"You shall have gold for the purpose," was Mr. Lawson's answer.

"And who is the individual?" asked Chiffin.

"Young Lord Saxondale," was the response. "But, Ah! you look surprised—"

"It's nothing, sir—don't mind anything you observe about me. Sometimes the mention of names produces an effect on me. I knew his lordship by sight: and that's a great help in the present matter."

"It is, Mr. Brown," observed Lawson.

"But we are anxious that no delay should take place."

"Not a moment. What's o'clock now sir?"

"A little past ten," answered Mr. Lawson, looking at his watch.

"then I'll just step down in that neighbourhood at once, and take a look at the premises. Perhaps there will be some footman or servant-gal going out to fetch beer or what not: and if I can get a glimpse of their faces by the light of a street lamp or the gas of a public-house, I should very soon know whether it would be safe to sound the

party on the subject. But you had better leave it all to me, gentlemen; and I dare say I shall manage it to your satisfaction."

"Take ten guineas," said Mr. Lawson, "in the shape of secret service money, as the Home Secretary would call it: in other words, use it for bribery and corruption as you think fit."

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind waiting an hour or so," observed Chiffin; "and then I could tell you more about it on my return: for there's a good many things to be taken into consideration."

"Go at once, and we will stop here until you come back. By the bye," added Mr. Lawson, "tell the landlord to send up some brandy and some cigars."

Chiffin the Cannibal issued forth from the room; and during his absence, which lasted until near midnight, Mr. Lawson and his French friend whiled away the time by means of conversation and the cigars,—doing but little honour to the spirituous liquor. The Count de St. Gerard was in a melancholy mood: but his English friend, being entirely in his confidence, was acquainted with the cause and studiously avoided any allusion to Adelaide Saxondale. At length Chiffin re-appeared; and they both at once saw by the cunning leer of grim satisfaction which was on his countenance that he had tidings of importance to report.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, as he resumed his seat, "I think the business will be easily managed now. When I went down to the neighbourhood of the mad-house, I lurked about, making my observations in respect to the premises, and waiting to see whether anybody would come out. First I saw a footman—then a savage-looking chap that I suppose was a keeper—and then another feller that seemed as if he was a gardener or labourer on the grounds. Well, it was this third chap I got hold of: we went and had a glass together; and I slipped some money into his hand. So then he let out that Lord Saxondale was going to be removed this very night to some other place—but where he didn't know. Dr. Burdett's carriage was however ordered to be ready at half past eleven. So I told the gardener-chap he must find out where it was going to take young Lord Saxondale, and I would give him some more money. He agreed—and I waited a little while in the public-house till he came back. He brought me the news I wanted:

for he had listened to catch the orders that Dr. Burdett gave the coachman after young Saxondale was put with a couple of keepers safe in the carriage."

"And what was the destination?" inquired Lawson, anxiously.

"Dr. Ferney's, in Conduit Street," replied Chiffin. "And that's a name too—but no matter. I think from some little knowledge I have of matters, I can do your business, gentlemen, as well as possible: but it can't be done, you know, to night. It's too late."

"To-morrow night?" said Lawson, after exchanging a few whispered words with the Count de St. Gerard.

"Yes—to-morrow night without fail," rejoined Chiffin. "I stake my reputation on it; and when I say that, I say everything."

"No doubt, friend Brown," observed Lawson. "You seem so confident of doing the business that perhaps you may think yourself justified in telling up at what hour, punctually, we are to have a post-chaise in readiness in the immediate neighbourhood of this Dr. Ferney's dwelling, that Lord Saxondale may be borne away beyond the reach of pursuit and danger?"

"I tell you what, gentlemen," answered Chiffin, when he had reflected for a few moments: "let the matter stand in this way;—that punctually at one o'clock to-morrow night, you can have a post-chaise-and-four in Hanover Square: but if so be anything should happen to induce me to think it necessary to alter my plan so as to make it an hour earlier or an hour later, you must tell me where I can let you know; for I have got to see another party, to consult him on certain particulars."

"Well, well," interrupted Mr. Lawson, "let the arrangements stand as you have suggested. My house is in Clifford Street, Bond Street,"—and he mentioned the number—"at no great distance, you perceive, from the scene of operations. My friend here"—alluding to the Count—"will dine with me to-morrow evening; and therefore, if you have anything to communicate, you can send a note or call at my abode. If we hear nothing from you and see nothing of you up to midnight, we shall conclude that the arrangement stands good. And now take thirty guineas as an earnest of our liberality: and if you succeed in effecting the liberation of Lord Saxondale, we

shall not stop at the fifty guineas originally alluded to as the price of your services. But one more word, Mr. Brown, "What if you should fail? and what if you should be arrested in the midst of the failure? Can we rest assured that you will hold us harmless?"

"It would be no good gentlemen, to peach against you," responded Chiffin, as he gathered up the money.

"No: and besides," added Mr. Lawson, "we might be of service to you if you got into trouble—which we could not be if we ourselves were involved in the same dilemma."

"To be sure, gentlemen," rejoined Chiffin: but he thought to himself that if he did happen to get arrested it would be hard work indeed for his two present employers to save him from the gallows; he did not however consider it worth while to name this small circumstance to them.

"We will say good night, friend Brown," observed Mr. Lawson: whereupon he and the Count de St. Gerard took their departure.

"Now, said Chiffin to himself, "I must without loss of time make the best of my way to old Bob Shakerly, who knows all about the ins and outs of Dr. Ferney's dwelling; and he will moreover give me safe and comfortable accommodation at his own crib till to-morrow night. It's rather hard, though, not to be able to get to bed, so precious tired as I am: but these wells chaps appear to be liberal enough—and the more money I get hold of before I start for America, the better."

CHAPTER CXXXIV.

EDMUND AT DR. FERNEY'S.

MEANWHILE Dr. Burdett's private carriage was rolling through the maze of London towards Conduit Street. The windows were drawn up—the blinds drawn down; and Lord Saxondale sat inside, with a keeper on his right hand, and another placed opposite to him.

He spoke not a word: deeply depressed—miserably desponding, the young man was almost completely spirit-broken. Vainly, when first conveyed to Dr. Burdett's establishment two days previously, had he protested against the outrage: vainly had he declared his sanity;

vainly, too, did he have recourse to prayers and entreaties—even the most abject beseeching—that his freedom might be restored. He found that he was entirely a prisoner—and that it was the intention of those around to keep him so. Exhausted with the excitement of his feelings, and the passionate outpourings of his intercessions, he had fallen into that depressed state in which we now behold him. Thus was it that he had slept soundly throughout the night following his captivity:—and the whole of the two following days he had wandered about in the spacious garden attached to Dr. Burdett's establishment. That he had for a moment thought of escape, was but natural:—when however he perceived how well the asylum was guarded, and that the walls were bristling with chevaux-de-frise like any prison, he abandoned the transient hope and relapsed into despondency. Thus the time had passed; and when late in the evening of the second day it was intimated to him that he was about to be removed elsewhere, he appeared for the instant rather pleased than otherwise at the idea of anything in the shape of novelty; but almost immediately sank down again into gloomy despond. Thus to those around him had he the air of a sort of melancholy madness.

We must now explain how it was that Dr. Ferney's mansion in Conduit Street was about to receive Edmund Saxondale. The reader has already understood enough of Dr. Ferney's character to observe that he was a man who devoted himself to the medical art, rather from an intense love of the study in all its branches; than from simple motives of gain. He had rendered himself a proficient in anatomy—he was a profound chemist, inventive as well as analytical—and he had lately thought of turning his attention to the peculiarities of the human mind. When once the idea occurred to him that his thirst for knowledge in the profession to which he was devoted, would experience some gratification in psychological study, he resolved to enter upon it. The phenomena he had observed in respect to the mind of the Earl of Castlemaine, gave an impulse to this desire on Dr. Ferney's part to push his researches and extend his observations in the sphere of the insane—or rather of those whose intellects developed peculiar aberrations and

idiosyncracies. He had therefore caused a portion of his house to be fitted up in a manner proper for the reception of two or three patients; and scarcely were these arrangements completed, when opportunity furnished him with the means of forwarding his views. Amongst the few intimate friends that he chose to possess, was Dr. Burdett; and to this gentleman had he communicated the purpose which we have just explained. When therefore Mr. Marlow hastened to Dr. Burdett and informed him of Lady Saxondale's desire that her son should be secretly and privately transferred elsewhere, this physician immediately suggested Dr. Ferney's house as one where the patient would experience the best treatment, and would be kept in a greater seclusion than a large and regularly established asylum could possibly afford. Mr. Marlow had not the remotest idea that Lady Saxondale was acquainted with Dr. Ferney; and even if he had known that she was so, he would still have been far from suspecting that there were portentous secrets existing between them. In short, the lawyer saw no reason why Edmund should not be transferred to the physician's house in Conduit Street: but, on the contrary, he saw every reason to regard this place as most eligible. Accordingly, Dr. Burdett despatched by a messenger, a few hurried lines to Dr. Ferney, to intimate that he would send him a patient in the middle of the coming night; and fearful lest by any accident the letter should be lost or peered into by its bearer Dr. Burdett forbore from mentioning the name of the patient who was to be thus transferred to Dr. Ferney's care.

To return to the thread of our narrative. The carriage rolled through the streets of London; and half-an-hour after midnight, stopped at Dr. Ferney's residence in Conduit Street. The physician, who had duly received his friend Burdett's letter, was sitting up in expectation of this arrival. Mr. Thompson, who still continued to reside with the worthy doctor, had long before retired to rest,—leaving his benefactor to attend to his own avocations. When the carriage stopped, Dr. Ferney came forth from the front door—his footman, who had likewise sat up, remaining in the hall. First one keeper alighted, and bade the young nobleman follow: the mandate was

obeyed by the crushed and spirit-broken Edmund:—the other keeper was close at his heels—and in this manner was he received by Dr. Ferney, who ushered him into the house.

"Dr. Burdett, sir," said one of the keepers aside to Ferney, "will write or call to-morrow, to make you acquainted with such circumstances regarding the patient as it may be necessary for you to know."

"That will do," answered Ferney, "But, by the bye, your master omitted in his note of to-day to mention the patient's name."

"I was ordered to explain, sir," responded the keeper, "that this was done purposely; inasmuch as there is some treachery at work, endeavouring to effect the young nobleman's liberation. But his mother and guardians feel convinced that it is absolutely necessary for him to remain under constraint; and his presence at your house must be kept as secret as possible."

"But who is he?" inquired Dr. Ferney.

"Lord Saxondale, sir," was the rejoinder: and as the keeper, having thus spoken looked around to assure himself that the patient was in complete security, and that there was no avenue of escape, he did not observe the startling effect which his announcement had produced upon Dr. Ferney.

Almost immediately afterwards the two keepers took their departure: the footman locked, bolted, and chained the front door; and the physician remained alone in the parlour with his patient. And this patient was Lord Saxondale, the son of that woman whom Ferney had so long loved, but whose real name and rank were only so recently made known to him!—that lady, too, whose deep damning guilt was so marvellously brought to his knowledge—and who had knelt at his feet as a murderess, imploring that he would not send her to the gallows; Yes: the son of that woman who for so many long years had been the idol of his almost sainted worship—that woman whom he had loved with a devotion as pure as it was unflinching, as holy as it was unextinguishable,—the son of that woman was now beneath his roof!

Such were the reflections which swept hurriedly through the mind of Dr. Ferney when the keepers had taken their departure—when the house was locked up—and when he was alone

in that parlour with his patient. Until this occasion Lord Saxondale was personally unknown to him;—and now, as he contemplated that short, thin, slightly made young man, he could trace in his features not the slightest resemblance to Lady Saxondale. The mother had hair of raven blackness—Edmund hair of yellowish brown: the former had eyes large and dark, and flashing fire—the latter eyes which can only be described as of the ignoble hue of greenish grey: the former was characterized by an aquiline profile—the latter with features mean and vulgar. There was something grand and magnificent in the appearance of Lady Saxondale—something despicable and paltry in that of Edmund. Never was there such dissimilitude between two individuals bearing such relationship to each other!

Dr. Ferney was amazed: but his was not a countenance that vividly exhibited such a feeling; and therefore Edmund, who sat looking up at him, noticed not the sentiment his presence inspired. Gradually strange ideas began creeping into the mind of Dr. Ferney. His memory travelled back to bygone days; he retrospected to that period when he was first acquainted with Lady Saxondale—and to the incident which had to a certain degree linked them most mysteriously together. Slowly turning aside, Dr. Ferney raised his hand to his brow, and murmured to himself, "My God! my God! if it should be so—and if I have been instrumental—But, no: it cannot be! And yet if not *that*, what *else*?"

The unhappy man was well nigh overcome by these dread misgivings—these dire apprehensions, which had arisen in his soul: but still Edmund Saxondale observed not the physician's emotion—for he had cast down his eyes, and had relapsed into the profoundest despondency. He had seen that the entreaties and prayers addressed to Dr. Burdett were so unavailing that he had not the heart nor the courage to repeat them over again to his new custodian to whom he was entrusted, he had heard too the locking of the front door—and the sound had smitten upon his ear like the knell of any new hope that for a moment he might have formed. Presently he became aware that the physician, with whose very name he was unacquainted was approaching him; and looking up from the sofa where he sat, he was as much surprised as suddenly delighted to observe the truly compassionate

manner in which Dr. Ferney was regarding him,

"Pray tell me who you are, and where this house is situated?" said Lord Saxondale, whose habitual arrogance and flip-pant air of assumption had yielded beneath the heavy weight of humiliating adversity: "for Dr. Burdett told me nothing more than that I was to be removed elsewhere—and the carriage that brought me hither, had the blinds down."

"My young friend," responded the physician, in a kind tone, and seating himself by Edmund's side, "I will give you such explanations as you may require. My name is Ferney—and this house is in Conduit Street. Believe me, you shall be treated with the utmost kindness. Every day, when it is fine, we will go out in my carriage together; and when in the open country we will alight and walk—for there is but a very small garden attached to this house——"

"But my dear sir," interrupted Edmund, still cheered and encouraged by the physician's words and manner; "I really am not mad. I know that I have been foolish, headstrong, and infatuated—and that I did a very mad action: but still I am in the full possession of my intellects. My mother and guardians have treated me infamously in having me locked up. I know that it is all my mother's and old Petersfield's doing: they are at the bottom of it. But question me on any subject you like; and you will see whether I give you rational answers. I know why I have been pronounced mad: it was because I fell desperately in love with a very splendid creature—love at first sight—and the circumstances were so peculiar, that I married her. It was all done in a few days—as quick indeed as it could be done. But a single mad action does not prove thorough and complete madness in all things."

"It is now so very late, my young friend," observed Dr. Ferney, "that we had better postpone all farther discourse until to-morrow. Immediately after breakfast I will devote an hour or two to hear all that you may have to say."

"And if you are satisfied that I am not mad," exclaimed Edmund, now catching eagerly—indeed with the liveliest avidity, at the hope of speedy liberation, "what will you do?"

"I will assuredly recommend Lady

Saxondale and your guardians to restore you to freedom."

"Ah! if it depends upon them, it is useless," observed Edmund, shaking his head gloomily, while a shade again fell upon his countenance. "I believe my mother hates me: she has told me as much. She once called me a viper that she had cherished to sting her. Was not that pretty language for a parent to hold to her son?"

"She spoke thus to you?" said Dr. Ferney, in a slow interrogative tone: and again he contemplated the young nobleman with a sort of melancholy interest, in which there was blended a certain strange expression, as if his own heart was enduring a sense of anguish.

"Yes—and often, for some months past, has she said things of this sort," replied Edmund. "I know that she hates me; and what is more, she is a bad woman—I am convinced she is, in many respects——"

"Enough! enough!" suddenly ejaculated Dr. Ferney, with a vehemence which appeared singular indeed to Lord Saxondale. "I beseech you, my young friend," he almost immediately added, "to ascend to the chamber prepared for you; and I renew my pledge that tomorrow, after breakfast, you shall unburthen your mind full to me."

"With that assurance I must remain contented:"—and as he uttered these words, Edmund rose from his seat.

Dr. Ferney rang the bell; and the footman re-appeared, bearing a chamber-candle. The physician shook hands cordially with the young nobleman, who was then conducted by the domestic to the bed-room arranged for his accommodation, and adjoining which there was another chamber really intended for a keeper, but where the footman himself was to sleep, at least for this night. For the announcement made by Dr. Burdett to the effect that he was about to send Ferney a patient, had reached the latter so late, and had come so unexpectedly upon him, that he had not as yet found time to procure the services of a regular keeper; and whether he would have to do so at all in respect to Lord Saxondale, he had resolved should depend upon the nature of the discourse to be held with the young nobleman on the following day.

It was long past one o'clock in the morning when Edmund was conducted to his chamber. Dr. Ferney did not immediately seek his own—but remained

in the parlour, absorbed in profoundest thought. An hour thus passed; and then Dr. Ferney, taking a light in his hand, ascended to the suits of apartments to which Lord Saxondale had been consigned. By means of a pass key he entered, without the necessity of disturbing the footman to obtain admittance. The domestic immediately started up as Dr. Ferney entered: but the latter, placing his finger to his lip to enjoin silence, continued his way into Edmund's room.

The young nobleman slept profoundly. The physician closed the door behind himself, and remained in that chamber for upwards of five minutes. When he issued forth again—and as the light which he carried in his hand threw its rays upon his countenance—the footman, who occupied the antechamber, noticed that his master was very pale, and that despite the wonted serenity of his look, there was a certain trouble and agitation visible beneath the surface. Dr. Ferney passed on without uttering a word—and issued forth, closing the door and locking it with his private key. And when the physician reached his own chamber, did he immediately seek his couch? did he at once put off his apparel and woo the slumber, of which, at that late hour in the night, or rather early hour of the morning, he might naturally be supposed to stand so much in need? No: he paced to and fro for a long time: and if any one had been listening at the door of his apartment, the sounds of sobs and other tokens of anguish would have been heard issuing from within. At length he retired to bed; but whether, when his head pressed the pillow, and sleep, wooed by exhaustion, sank upon his eyes, the subjects of his waking thoughts pursued him in the shape of dreams, we cannot say. He rose—little refreshed, more pale than usual, and with a certain haggardness of look—at seven o'clock: an hour, according to his invariable custom, was passed in his laboratory or his museum; then he sought the breakfast-table—and afterwards the promised interview with Lord Saxondale took place.

It was about noon; and Dr. Ferney's carriage was in readiness to convey him to some place where he intended to call,—when a handsome equipage drew up near the house; a short stout elderly individual alighted—and on being shown up to the physician's drawing-room, gave the name of the Marquis of Eagledean

Dr. Ferney had just terminated a long conversation which he held alone with Lord Saxondale: he was anxious to go out—and he could have gladly dispensed with the necessity of receiving a visit professionally. Nevertheless, he was a man of too much courtesy to refuse to see the nobleman who thus called; and he therefore hastened to the drawing-room. He had no previous acquaintance with the Marquis of Eagledean—indeed, had scarcely ever heard of him: for few persons in Dr. Ferney's sphere of life had less knowledge than he of high names and sounding titles,—those only being familiar to his ear with the owners of which he professionally came in contact.

"I hope I am not intruding, Dr. Ferney, upon your more important duties," began the Marquis: "but I wish to speak to you on a subject in which I am more or less interested; and I am induced to address myself to you, having recently read in a scientific publication of certain wondrous discoveries you have made in the branch of chemistry."

Dr. Ferney bowed in acknowledgment of the compliment thus implied; and the Marquis of Eagledean went on.

"I must briefly observe, Dr. Ferney, that by certain means, a small phial—containing, I believe, an active poison—recently fell into my hands—"

"Ah, indeed!" murmured the physician, horrible associations and even fears springing up in his mind: for he instantaneously thought of that phial which Lady Saxondale had stolen from him, and with which she had done such murderous work.

"Yes—that is my belief," continued the Marquis, imagining that Dr. Ferney had merely become interested in a philosophic sense in what he was saying; and not for a moment suspecting that he was smitten with any deeper feeling. "I was at first inclined to try the effect upon some animal—such as a cat or a rabbit; but I had not the heart to do so: and as I have something more than a sentiment of mere curiosity urging me on, I resolved to bring the phial to you, that you may either at once confirm my belief, or else submit the fluid to an experimental process."

While the Marquis of Eagledean was thus speaking, the physician nerved himself with all his fortitude to meet whatsoever revelation might farther be made: for the conviction was settling in his

mind that it was the stolen phial, with the poison of his own elimination, which was about to be produced. Perhaps it was because the image of Lady Saxondale was so completely uppermost in his mind, and because certain new impressions relative to her character had just been made upon him during his conversation with her son—perhaps, we say, it was for these reasons that a phial of active poison, accidentally falling into another person's hands, should so immediately identify itself in his imagination with the one pilfered from him by her ladyship.

"Here it is," said the Marquis of Eagledean; and the physician's apprehension was confirmed; it was his own phial—and he full well knew the deadly properties of the liquid it contained!

"My lord," he answered, "I feel honoured and flattered by the compliment you pay me by thus appealing to whatsoever little scientific knowledge I may possess in this matter. I am sure your lordship will not take it to be offensive, when I state that I am particularly pressed for time to-day: my carriage, as you may have observed, is waiting at the door——"

"I beseech, Dr. Ferney," exclaimed the Marquis, rising from the chair, "that you will not put yourself to any inconvenience on my account. I will leave the phial with you. In a few days I shall be in London again; and I will do myself the pleasure of calling. Meanwhile, you will perhaps examine the contents."

"I will, my lord—I will," responded the physician, with a nervousness which he could not altogether subdue, but which the Marquis merely took to be the impatience of one who was sorely pressed for time.

Lord Eagledean accordingly departed forthwith.

"Thank heavens! this tell-tale phial and this fatal fluid have come back again into my hands:"—it was thus that Ferney murmured to himself when he was once more alone: then hastening to his laboratory, he secured the bottle in a cupboard amongst other chemical preparations.

The physician having done this, descended to his carriage, and ordered the coachman to drive to Saxondale House. The mistress of the mansion was at home; and Dr. Ferney was invited to ascend to the drawing-room where she was seated. As he followed

the footman thither, he lingered somewhat on the stairs in order to compose his feelings ere once more finding himself in the presence of that woman who for long, long years he had so fondly loved, but whom he knew to be a murderess! He entered the apartment with a look of mingled mournfulness and severity,—mournfulness because he reflected that one whom he had thus cherished as the idol of his soul's worship, and whose beauty was so magnificent, was deeply criminal; and severity, because he felt the necessity of exercising as strong a control as possible over his own emotions, in order that Lady Saxondale might not think he could in any way sympathize with the black deed which he had nevertheless promised to retain inviolably secret.

The moment the footman announced his name, her ladyship gave a sudden start—but so slight to outward appearance, as not to be noticed by the lacquey; and instantaneously recovering her self-possession, she assumed her most affable air—her most winning look—as she advanced to greet the physician with an affected effusion of warmest friendship. She seized both his hands before he could possibly anticipate that movement on her part, or avoid it if he had wished; and bending upon him the whole power of her brilliant eyes, she said, "My dear Dr. Ferney, you know not how rejoiced I am to behold you beneath this roof."

The physician had come prepared to remonstrate—to argue—to upbraid—to dictate: but all his resolves were melting away beneath the ineffable spell which that woman had the power of wielding over him. And she too—subtle being that she was—knew full well the mighty force of this influence which she possessed. She had divined at once that he came for no agreeable purpose: and whatever it were, she sought to disarm him beforehand of any resentment that might have been provoked, or of any sense of duty which remorseful or scrupulous feelings might have re-awakened,—in a word, to neutralize at once whatsoever aim he might have in view, if hostile to her own interests. Still, therefore, did she bend upon him the full blaze of her magnificent eyes,—throwing into that flood of lustre a degree of tenderness which from those orbs had never shone upon him before:

so that he was dazzled and bewildered—he felt his head turning as if with intoxication—while the contact of her warm fair hands, which still grasped his own, increased this inebriety of the senses.

"Now, my dear friend—my best and most esteemed friend," said Lady Saxondale, "come and sit by me, and tell me what has procured for me the pleasure of this visit: because I know full well that your time is so devoted to professional and scientific pursuits, it is not a more complimentary call you are making."

Dr. Ferney felt ashamed of himself at having yielded, even though it were only for a few moments, to the inebriating influences of Lady Saxondale's beauty. He literally writhed beneath the humiliating idea of his weakness:—the sense of that duty which he had to perform, acquired power in his mind;—again did his look become mournfully severe; and rising from the sofa where she had made him sit down, he stood before her—folded his arms across his breast—and said, "Lady, I must forget the past so far as it regards my own heart. Would to God that I could likewise forget all the incidents which, belonging unto that past, have been so deplorably connected with you!"

"Are you come to upbraid me for what cannot be recalled?" asked Lady Saxondale in a voice of melancholy reproach,—while inwardly she was frightened at the look and manner of the physician, who seemed as if he had at length escaped from the fascinating influence of her image, or was enabled to exert sufficient moral power to throw that influence off. "Tell me my dear friend—are you come to upbraid me," she repeated, "for those things which, having been done, cannot be undone?"

"That is not altogether my object," replied the physician, as he still stood before her with folded arms. "Oh! how is it, Lady Saxondale," he cried, with a subdued access of excitement, "that you, whom I have loved so long and with so sublime a worship, should have proved mine evil genius? Woman, I feel that my conscience is blackened with crimes on account of you! The world looks upon me as one who leads a pure and stainless life—as a man too enthusiastically devoted to the

noble art which he professes to have thought, or leisure, or opportunity for anything beside. The world looks upon my countenance—beholds it pensively serene—and imagines that if there be any wrinkles there, they have been traced by closest study and by vigils of research: but little is it deemed how deep a remorse my soul now cherishes!"

As the physician went on speaking, dire apprehensions gathered and strengthened in the mind of Lady Saxondale; and she felt that she must exercise all her arts, all her wiles—and bring into play all her powers of fascination and cajolery to level that man once more in submissiveness and blind obedience to her feet.

"Dr. Ferney," she answered, rendering the cadences of her voice as musically mournful and tenderly melting as she possibly could, "know you not I am already the unhappiest of women, and that it would take but little to make me grasp the dagger or imbibe the poison of a desperate suicide? And will you, Dr. Ferney—you whom I have looked upon as my best and dearest friend—you for whom I have perhaps entertained a feeling which reciprocates your own, but the existence of which I have never until this moment confessed to your ears,—will *you*, I ask, take any step that shall help to drive me to that fearful consummation?"

"O my God!" exclaimed Ferney, pressing his hand to his wildly throbbing brows, "is it possible that you do really love me?—No, no—I cannot believe it! You tell me so now for reasons of your own: for, alas! alas! I cannot blind myself to the fact that you are a woman whose soul is a compound of duplicities and treacheries—you are a woman stained with crimes—possessing a fiend's capacity for mischief under the guise of that grand and glorious beauty! And I too," continued Dr. Ferney, "with passionate vehemence,—*I* too have been rendered, though heaven knows how unconsciously at the time, an accomplice in the stupendous fraud which you have perpetrated!"

"Ah!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, becoming white as a sheet, and her lips livid, as she half started from the sofa: "would you allude to that mystery?—would you allude to it, I ask? Remember your solemn pledge—that whatever its nature might be, it is *my* secret, and you would never make the slightest attempt to penetrate it!"

"But what, Lady Saxondale," responded the physician, fixing his eyes penetratingly upon her, "if accident should have brought about circumstances leading to a thorough revelation of the motive?"

"Enough, enough!" murmured Lady Saxondale, in a hoarse voice: "there may be listeners!"—and starting from the sofa, she sped to the door of the apartment. "No—fortunately we are unheard by others," she said, having opened the door and looked forth.

"See, unfortunate woman," remarked the physician, "what it is to have a guilty conscience. A single word flying out from within these four walls, may be like a spark to a mass of gunpowder, and cause an explosion of all the fabrics of duplicity and crime you have built up,—burying yourself in the ruins!"

"Now, Dr. Ferney," said Lady Saxondale, approaching close up to him, and laying her hand upon his arm, while she looked with tender entreaty into his countenance,—*"I beseech you to sit down by my side—throw off this strange manner which you wear—speak to me as a friend—but speak in whispers,—and tell me what has occurred, that you have come thus to upbraid me now?"*

The physician suffered himself to be so far persuaded that he did sit down by Lady Saxondale's side upon the sofa; and for a moment an expression of triumph appeared upon her countenance: for she felt confident that whatsoever had transpired, the physician was still to a certain degree within the silken trammels which love had woven about his heart.

"Listen to me, Lady Saxondale," he said, not daring to look at her as he spoke: for he again felt the magical influence of her charms. "I have several subjects to touch upon. In the first place, that phial of deadly poison—that phial which you took from my laboratory—how came it in the possession of the Marquis of Eagledean?"

"What!" ejaculated her ladyship, amazed at the new turn which the physician's discourse had thus abruptly taken: "are you acquainted with the Marquis?"

"Never before this day. He brought me the phial for analization—"

"And you have kept it? you have kept it?" interrupted Lady Saxondale, eagerly.

"Oh, yes indeed! I have kept it!" answered the physician: "and never more shall it quit my possession."

"No—keep it, keep it—destroy it—or at all events give it not back to the hands of the Marquis of Eagledean."

"Ah! unhappy woman, I comprehend!" said Dr. Ferney, an expression of renewed anguish sweeping over his countenance: "it is the evidence of some fresh crime which you are thus disirous should be withholden from the hands of the Marquis."

"Solemnly do I swear," quickly responded her ladyship, "that no fresh crime has been consummated."

"What, then, am I to think?" asked the physician:—"that it was meditated, but that it failed? Oh, my heavens! is it all a dream? or is it a hideous reality? Can one of such splendid beauty as yourself be so darkly criminal?"

"Spare me—spare me!—continue not these bitter upbraidings!" murmured Lady Saxondale: and seizing the physician's hand, she held it between both her own. "Now tell me what else has transpired?"

"Lord Saxondale," answered Ferney, slowly withdrawing his hand, and looking her ladyship full in the face, "is an inmate of my house."

"Of your house?" she repeated: "of your house?"—and she gazed in a sort of wild astonishment upon Ferney. "What means this? what circumstances have brought it about? Are you resolved to ruin me? have you got him there to serve such a purpose? Oh, am I deceived in you? are you no longer my friend? do you hate me now? Why—why seek to drive me to distraction?"

"Calm yourself, Lady Saxondale—calm yourself, if you can" answered the physician, alarmed at the terrific excitement which she had just manifested. "Edmund was last night transferred from Dr. Burdett's asylum to my house—"

At this moment the door opened; and Lady Saxondale suddenly assumed an air of composure as a domestic entered to present a letter which had just arrived. It was from Mr. Marlow, and briefly announced "that on the previous night Lord Saxondale had been carefully and secretly removed to the abode of a very eminent physician, Ferney by name, and who resided in Conduit Street." This letter was a source of infinite relief to the

guilty and intriguing woman, inasmuch as it proved to her in a moment that it was through no hostile intent Dr. Ferney had become the custodian of Edmund—but that a strange coincidence in the chapter of accidents had consigned the youth to his care. Glancing round to assure herself that the domestic who brought the letter had retired, she said to Ferney, "This is from my solicitor, announcing that Edmund is at your house."

"And last night," responded the physician, "when Edmund slept, I entered his chamber stealthily—he awoke not—and I discovered—"

"Enough!" interrupted Lady Saxondale, in a low thick voice: "think you that I cannot comprehend your meaning? But listen to me, Dr. Ferney—listen to me! That secret is *mine*: you will not make use of it—you cannot—it would ruin yourself as well as me. Of what avail to do this?"

"Oh! think not, think not," interrupted the physician, "that I can drag on my miserable existence with this dreadful load upon my conscience! No: whatever be the results either to you or to me, I must perform an act of justice towards some one who is perhaps wronged—"

"No, no," ejaculated Lady Saxondale vehemently: you must not—you cannot! No one is wronged! Believe me—Oh! believe me, when I solemnly assure you of this. I am at your mercy: not merely my character, but my life is in your hands. Now, Dr. Ferney—be your decision promptly given: for I will submit two alternatives for your consideration. The first is, that if you will spare me—if you will continue to keep the seal of utter silence upon your lips in respect to all the past—I will be everything to you! I will be your slave—your mistress—your paramour: I will submit myself to you—I will clasp you in my embrace—I will return you a thousand-fold that love which you have so long borne towards me! That is one alternative. The other is this:—if you tell me *now* that on going hence it is for the purpose of avowing everything and laying bare all that I have conjured you to conceal, I will seek my own chamber—and there will I plunge a sharp-pointed knife deep down into this bosom which covers a tortured heart!"

As she thus spoke with a vehemence which was more or less assumed, Lady

Saxondale suddenly tore open the front of her dress and revealed the snowy grandeur of her bust. The deed was an exquisite piece of acting, and had an air perfectly natural. It was the crowning act of *finesse* on the part of this wily woman. At the same time she threw so much frantic wildness into the expression of her countenance, as to confirm the belief on the physician's the part that proceeding was all unstudied,—so that he *did* imagine he beheld before him a woman goaded to the very verge of desperation,

But in one sense Lady Saxondale had mistaken Dr. Ferney's disposition. Believing that the love he had cherished for her was allied with sensuous passion, she thought to subdue him altogether, and by bringing him into her arms, enchain him more firmly than ever to her interests; and in order to accomplish this, the unprincipled woman was prepared to abandon herself to him. But she smote him only with pity and commiseration—not with maddening passion.

"Lady Saxondale," he said, gazing upon her countenance with an expression ineffably compassionate, and not upon that bared bosom with desire,—*"you know me not—you understand me not! Were you not thus frantic—thus driven to desperation—I should consider that you had insulted me to the most painful degree. Adjust your raiment, I beseech of you!"*—and he suddenly averted his eyes,

Lady Saxondale hastened to do his bidding, for she feared lest some one should enter: but still she saw that her empire over the physician was regained through the medium of the pity with which he was inspired, if not by the passion which she had sought to excite. Little, however, did it matter to her how he had become enmeshed again in her silken chains, so long as he was thus rendered captive.

"Yes—you have misunderstood me," he went on to observe: "you have not rightly comprehended my character. For nineteen long years have I loved you—but with a love the holiest, the chastest, the purest. Alas! I feel that this love is stronger than myself: it has become interwoven with the very principles of my existence. Were you a fiend in female shape, I must still love you all the same: the interview of this hour proves to me that it is so! I came to give you the positive assurance that I would perform an act of duty at

all and any risk: and, behold! I am weak and powerless, disarmed, unnerved, in your presence. No, no," he continued, in a voice tremulous with emotion, and almost as if he in his turn had become a suppliant, "I conjure you not to lay violent hands upon yourself! Oh, not for worlds would I sully the purity of that love—the sanctity of that adoration—which I have experienced for you! You yourself may be the foulest and uncleanest wretch alive: but my love has been a worship—and it shall not be polluted. I will not sell my compassion for the enjoyment of your charms: I shudder at the idea of compelling you to abandon yourself to my embraces as the price of your security. I will not hurt a single hair of your head. No—by heaven, no! I will drag about with me my remorse as a prisoner drags his chain: the dread secrets of which my heart is a depository, may eat like iron into that heart—may corrode every fine feeling there—may cover with rust the brightest sentiments of my soul: but still I will not seek relief for that harrowed conscience by betraying *you*! I will be a criminal—I will do anything sooner than drive you to despair. See, Lady Saxondale—see, Harriet—what a power you wield over me!—Oh, I shudder when I think of it—and yet do I kiss the chain!"

It is impossible to convey to the reader an idea of those highly-wrought feelings which inspired the physician as he thus gave vehement utterance to that long and partially broken speech. There was a man naturally endowed with the noblest sentiments and loftiest thoughts—a man of splendid genius and brilliant intellect—a man who within himself possessed every element of virtue, and who amongst the good of this world might have shone as the best,—*there* was this man, we say, altered,—changed,—with feelings distorted, sentiments warped, mind made morbid, soul rendered attenuate,—and all by the indomitable influence of the love which he cherished? And this man too, while consenting to become the accomplice of crime as he had already been made its agent,—here was this man, with what may be termed the idiosyncrasy of virtue, refusing the recompense of vice—allowing his love to render him criminal, and yet having strength of mind to reject the reward which he might have grasped! Truly such a love as this exists not often in

the world,—a love that could keep itself chaste and holy while prompting him who possessed it to trample upon all the scruples of conscience!

"My dear friend—my ever dear friend," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, in a tone of joyous enthusiasm when she saw how completely he was vanquished. "you have inspired me with new life. Oh, I must embrace you as a friend—only as a friend!"

"No, Harriet," responded the physician, abruptly rising and retreating from her: it must not be so. To me at least you shall never appear in the light of a wanton. But now with regard to that unfortunate young man. This morning I have discoursed with him for a long time; and on my soul! it were unjust to keep him captive for another minute."

"What!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale; "after this mad alliance which he has formed——"

"And yet he is not mad," answered Ferney.

"He is mad, I tell you!" rejoined her ladyship vehemently: "even your own science may sometimes err. At all events I conjure you to keep him for a day or two until I shall have had time to see those who must be consulted in this matter. My dear friend, you must do nothing by halves: my interests guide me in all my proceedings—I will explain no more now. You have promised me much: is it too great a tax upon your friendship——"

"Good heavens!" murmured Ferney, almost wringing his hands as he spoke; "if you bade me sell my soul to Satan, I should obey! Edmund shall remain captive at my house."

With these words the physician turned abruptly away, and quitted the room.

The moment the door closed behind him, an expression of exultant satisfaction appeared upon the countenance of Lady Saxondale, and rising from her seat, she surveyed herself in the mirror. She had indeed good reason to be proud of her magnificent beauty; for by the power thereof she had triumphed over all the virtuous scruples of a man who was naturally good, but who under the influence of his fatal love was prepared to sell his very soul to Satan rather than harm a hair of her head.

But when turning away from that mirror, and when the first flush of

thrilling exultation was past, Lady Saxondale could not help feeling—and deeply feeling too—that many and great difficulties lay before her. It was impossible that Edmund could be left at Dr. Ferney's. His presence there would sooner or later re-awaken remorse in the physician's conscience; and the next time it was so, he might go and act at once under a sudden impulse, and without first coming to warn her of his intentions. Edmund must therefore be removed. But whither? This Lady Saxondale at present knew not. She however made up her mind to call personally on Dr. Burdett, and give him her own instructions without sending them through Marlow. For a few days, she felt convinced, it would be safe enough to leave Edmund where he was: and in the meantime she could make new as well as effective arrangements for his future keeping.

CHAPTER CXXXV.

A CHAPTER OF LOVE.

ON the same day, and at the same hour when the preceding scene took place, we shall find the beautiful Angela Deveril seated by the bedside of Madge Somers at the villa near the Regent's Park. The woman lay sleeping: her countenance was hideously pale—and her strongly marked features had become more peaked and angular, likewise as a result of the all but fatal illness which had followed the murderous assault she had sustained at the hands of Chiffin the Cannibal.

And, Oh! what a contrast did that countenance form with the lovely face of her who was watching in the room. For Angela was assuredly the most lovely of all the lovely females who have crowded upon the stage of this narrative; and certainly the world never presented a moreravishing embodiment of female charms. The dark dress that she wore, was fastened up to the throat; but the bust which it so modestly concealed, displayed its own rounded contours by defining as it were the shape and set of the *corsage* of that dress. Tall and slender, without leanness—on the contrary, with all the proportions justly modelled—her figure blended elastic liness with graceful elegance. No longer now did the short drapery of

the dancer display the rounded symmetry and straightness of the lower limbs: but still their sweeping length might be traced beneath the folds of her present raiment;—and when she rose to tread lightly across the room for any purpose, the exquisitely-shaped feet might be seen, and perhaps a glimpse caught of the delicate ankles. Her shining dark hair waved in ringlets about her classic head, and drooped upon the sloping shoulders. As the light from the window fell upon that hair, it seemed to crown that head as with a glory, so rich was the velvet gloss of those dark masses. The dazzling purity and transparency of her complexion was described in one of the earliest chapters: nor less was justice then done to the large dark eyes, so full of fire,—not the fire, of sensuous passion, like that which floods the saloons of pleasure; but a fire, holy, pure, and ineffably bright, like that, which burns upon an altar in a temple. Yes—ravishingly beautiful and beyond all description lovely, was Angela Deveril—but not less amiable and virtuous than physically enchanting.

If we peep into the room on the occasion specifically mentioned, we shall observe that there was a slight expression of pensiveness, not exactly merging into mournfulness. on the lovely countenance of Angela Deveril. The coral lips were slightly apart, affording a glimpse of teeth which it is a poor smile to liken either unto ivory or to pearls; for they outshone both,—the first in the purity of their whiteness, the last in their exquisite enamel. Her eyes were partially bent downward,—thus showing to the utmost advantage the lines of long, thick, silken lashes which fringed them. Yes—she was reflecting somewhat seriously perhaps, but not in a melancholy strain; for the young heart when beating with its first love, has more of hope than fear blended therewith; and even while scarcely conscious of the real nature of the feeling, yet does it experience and appreciate its luxury.

Of whom was Angela thinking? and had she settled herself thus to think of some one? or had his image stolen insensibly and unconsciously into her mind? Yes—it was so. For when the soul has become an elysium of love, it does not at once purposely and deliberately light itself up with the silver lamps which shed a soft and perfumed lustre around; but gradually and of its own accord, as if by magic power, does the gentle flood of

roseate light pour in, to reveal the image which the heart has enshrined there. Thus was it with Angela. Her patient had fallen off to sleep: the young maiden had at first taken her embroidery; but feeling a disinclination for it—she scarcely knew why she had taken a book:—then, still without knowing why, she could not settle her attention upon its pages; and thus she had abandoned embroidery—she had abandoned book—and gradually fell into a certain train of thought, which, as we before observed, had for her a certain serene and sweet luxury, greater than either the recreation of embroidery or book.

Young Cupid, the God of Love, though but a mere boy, is not without the most cunning experience: he knows full well the nature of every heart with which he has to deal. Into that which is characterised by strong passions, and belongs to a fervid and glowing temperament, he sometimes rushes precipitately, confident of being enabled to take the citadel by storm without resistance, and enthrone himself in empire there. In the heart, too, where the feelings, though untainted by sensuousness, are nevertheless susceptible as the sensitive plant and move to the slightest touch—or as the *Æolian* harp, which acknowledges the sway of the slightest zephyr—therein likewise does young Cupid frequently alight with a sudden bound, giving no warning of his approach. All this constitutes what is called love at first sight: but it is not always the most permanent. For an empire that is easily won, sooner or later satiates its conqueror with the very glory of his triumph: and so does young Cupid sometimes vanish away from certain hearts as abruptly as he entered them. But very different is it with that heart where the feelings lie deep—where modesty, and innocence, and artlessness constitute barriers preventing them from being too accessible to tender influences, and yet properly sensitive in respect to all generous sympathies,—where the passions lie still deeper down, kept in subjection by the same defences, and beyond the reach of undue provocatives. Into such a heart as this young Cupid cannot plunge headlong: he cannot take it by storm. Were he to make the endeavour, his presence would shock instead of pleasing; he would be recoiled from as an insolent intruder; and with drooping wings would be compelled to turn in humiliation away. Full well does

Cupid know all this; and therefore, with characteristic cunning, he enters stealthily and silently—he makes no noise—he breathes not a syllable—no, not even the name of him on whose part he comes: he flutters not his wings—he twangs not his bow—he proceeds gradiently and cautiously, like an army that enters by surprise into the midst of a fortalice in the depth of night. Then—even when the entry is made and the admission is obtained—Cupid goes not roughly on, as a man pushes his way through a dense forest, rudely thrusting aside the opposing boughs and snapping perhaps some of the branches: but he proceeds as one makes his way through a parterre of flowers in a lovely garden, gently and delicately picking his path amidst the floral beauties, so as to trample upon none—to break none—nor so much as to bruise a single slender stalk, nor to shake off one single quivering roseleaf. And having gained the depth of such a heart as this, young Cupid still plays a prudential part: he does not raise a shout—proclaim a name—set up an image—and call upon that heart's feelings to fall down in worship at once. No—he does not immediately make his presence known: he settles himself there; and he begins lightly and delicately to whisper to those feelings, that they may begin to vibrate softly and gently, as the leaves of a grove are faintly waved by the first kissing and wooing of the evening breeze. Thus is it by gradual steps and slow proceedings that Cupid makes his presence known in the heart to whose depths he has been compelled so stealthily to enter.

And so it was with Angela Deveril. In her young heart did Cupid sit: there had he enthroned himself—and she only just beginning to be conscious of his presence! There too had he set up an image—and she scarcely daring to admit to herself that she had caught the name of the idol which young Cupid, in soft and gentle whisperings, was calling upon her to worship! And that image—was it not the image of Francis Paton?

But let us return to the thread of our narrative. Madge Somers slept: and Angela Deveril was seated in that room which the woman had occupied ever since the evening when Chiffin's knife dealt her a blow which had so nearly proved fatal. The reader has learnt, from certain communications made by

Lady Saxondale to Lord Harold Staunton, how Madge Somers had all along remained deprived of the faculty of speech—how, after consciousness had returned, she showed by signs that she had upon her mind something whereof she yearned to unburthen herself—and how she had sought to write afterwards upon a slate, but had not been able. Therefore William and Angela knew full well that the secret she had to impart was of no ordinary moment—but that it was one of vast importance: though what, they could not possibly conjecture. They ministered unto her with the most unwearying attention, — not merely because they felt that her's was a life which, involving such a secret, was of importance to themselves—but likewise because they possessed hearts of the sublimest generosity. A nurse had from the very first been engaged to watch by night; and when this attendant snatched a few hours of necessary rest during the day, Angela took her place. We must not forget to mention that William Deveril was a constant visitor at Lady Macdonald's house in Cavendish Square; and frequent also were the visits which her ladyship and Florina paid to Angela at the villa. The closest intimacy—the sweet intimacy of sisters—had sprung up between the charming Florina and the ravishing Angela: while Lady Macdonald, though in many respects a worldly-minded woman, had conceived an almost maternal love for William Deveril's beauteous sister.

Angela, then, as we have said, was seated in the sick chamber on the occasion to which we particularly refer. Her brother had gone to pay his wonted visit in Cavendish Square: but he was to return soon,—for though devoted to her who was to be his bride, yet he never neglected his sister. Indeed, who that knew her, could neglect her? An angel in beauty and in mind as well as in name, this charming heroine of our's was one whom it was impossible to treat with coldness.

There she was seated; and insensibly her thoughts had settled upon the image of Francis Paton,—when presently Madge Somers awoke. It was strange to behold the earnest gratitude and affection which mingled in that woman's countenance; as she turned her eyes upon Angela. The lion, it is said,—forgetting his ferocity as regal

ruler of the forest,—will crouch down at the feet of an immaculate virgin; and assuredly the influence of Angela's kindness had subdued the fierce feelings and melted the hardened callousness of this woman's heart. Doubtless she felt that she owed her life to the ministrations of the young maiden; and having passed through as it were the very entrance of the valley of death itself, only to be drawn forth by that fair angel-hand, she would have been something less or something more than human if she had not thus felt and appreciated the true Christian sympathy and tender compassion which had influenced Miss Deveril's conduct towards her. The moment she awoke, Angela arose from her seat; and approaching the bed, bent over the invalid; and in the sweetest tones of her fluid voice asked whether she felt refreshed by the few hours of slumber she had enjoyed? Madge Somers made an affirmative sign, accompanied by another look of ineffable gratitude; and Angela presented her with some cooling beverage. When Madge had imbibed a small quantity, she made a sign that she wished to write,

"No," answered Angela; "I dare not give you the slate. Recollect," she continued, with the sweetest deprecating look, "how you fainted the other day when you endeavoured to write—and how positively the doctor ordered that you were not to be permitted to make the attempt again."

But Madge Somers repeated the sign, accompanying it with that imperiousness and petulance of motion which invalids often show when the faculty of speech is temporarily lost; and as Angela again spoke her objections—but in the sweetest manner—the woman's countenance exhibited great distress. Angela knew not exactly what to do. On the one hand she was afraid of irritating or exciting the invalid by a refusal; and, moreover she was naturally anxious to learn what the important secret was, which so closely concerned her brother. But on the other hand, the orders of the medical man were imperative. Madge Somers perceived Miss Deveril's hesitation; and as if determined to profit by it, repeated her signal more imperiously than before. Angela could no

longer refuse: but she resolved that at the slightest evidence which the woman might show of faintness and weakness, she would compel her to desist. She therefore gave her the slate; and by gently propping her up with pillows, placed her in a position the most convenient for the task which the invalid had undertaken.

Joy and satisfaction lighted up the countenance of Madge Somers as she thus received the slate; and the look which she bent upon Angela Deveril, was as much as to say that if she could only unburthen herself of the secret that lay upon her mind, she would no longer dread a relapse which might lead to death. Having flung that look, she evidently mustered all her energies for the purpose which she had undertaken; and the young damsel, helping to sustain her, watched Madge Somers with no small degree of anxiety and suspense. Oh! if the secret, whatever it might be, were about to be made known? Oh! if, when William returned, she could show him that secret pencilled upon the slate? Madge Somers began to write: slowly and painfully did she form a few letters; her hand trembled so that the strokes she made were all irregular and wavy. With increasing suspense and anxiety did Miss Deveril watch her: but by the time she had written these words—"William Deveril is the s—" a sudden faintness came over her. Angela snatched the slate from her hands: and here the task terminated.

Madge did not swoon off completely; but for upwards of a quarter of an hour she was as if about to faint away. When she recovered somewhat, she made a sign to have the slate again: but this time Angela was decisive, and would not consent. The invalid submitted; and soon afterwards relapsed into slumber. William Deveril now returned home from his visit to Cavendish Square; and Angela showed him the writing upon the slate. They were both lost in conjecture as to what the completion of the sentence might have been, when a carriage rolled up to the front of the villa—and the Marquis of Eagledean was speedily announced. To his lordship the writing was also shown; but he was no better able to guess what would have been the sequence, than were his two young friends.

"It is no use for us to waste our time," he said, with ineffectual imagination.

in a very short while the woman will either be able to complete the sentence by writing it or to communicate her meaning verbally. Until then we must have patience. Now, my young friends, I will tell you wherefore I call upon you thus unexpectedly to-day. We are all longing to have you at Edenbridge; and really we can postpone the pleasure no longer. You, Angela, will make yourself ill by too constant watching in the sick room: you must have change of air, even if it be only for a couple of days. Now, what I purpose is that you both come with me at once into Kent. You have faithful and trustworthy servants who will see that the invalid is duly cared for; and the nurse is a respectable, honest-minded woman. Not for a moment would I counsel you to leave the unfortunate creature, if I were not assured that she would be well ministered unto during your absence. It shall only be for a couple or three days, if you will: but come you must. You, William, sit down and pen a hasty note to Florina: tell her that I have carried you off. And you, Angela, give orders to your maid to pack up at once whatsoever things you intend to take with you."

"But, my lord," responded Angela, "the poor woman up stairs will miss me so much, that I am really afraid—"

"She would miss you much more, my dear Angela," interrupted the Marquis, "if you were to be laid up for the want of air."

"But I can assure your lordship I take sufficient exercise," rejoined the damsel. "Every evening I accompany William for a walk——"

"Well," continued the Marquis, laughing, "I certainly cannot say that your cheeks have lost their bloom: but still I feel convinced that the air of Edenbridge will do you good. Now, it shall only be for two clear days on this present occasion. With that understanding, will you come?"

Angela looked at William and saw by the expression of his countenance that he felt how impossible it would be to refuse their kind benefactor's invitation: and perhaps there was a secret feeling in her own gentle heart which likewise added its influence to other circumstances, thus inducing her to assent. She hastened up-stairs; and entering the sick-room, approached the bed where Madge Somers had just wakened up again.

"Do not be annoyed at what I am going to say—do not distress yourself, my poor woman, I beseech you. I am going on a little visit to the Marquis of Eagledean for a couple of days—only two days, I can assure you; and then you will see me here again. Meanwhile everything will continue to be done for your comfort: and on my return I hope to find you considerably improved. Farewell, then, for the present. Remember, only two days—and I shall be here again!"

It was thus that Angela spoke to the invalid woman, whose countenance at first expressed blank consternation at the intelligence,—as if she thought that those to whom her secret was to be revealed were to be separated from her altogether. But as the young damsel went on speaking, Madge's face cleared up: for she doubtless felt that it would be the height of ingratitude and selfishness to exhibit signs of displeasure at the brief interval of recreation which Angela proposed to take.

The preparations were speedily made—the fullest instructions were given to the domestics in respect to the care to be taken of Madge—the note was despatched to Florina—and William Deveril, with his sister, accompanied the Marquis of Eagledean to Edenbridge Park. There the brother and sister were most cordially welcomed by all the inmates. Mr. Hawkshaw had taken his departure: but Mrs. Leyden and Henrietta were now staying at the mansion—and thus there was a complete party.

It was on the second day after the arrival of William and Angela at Edenbridge, that the scene we are about to describe took place. Let the reader picture to himself a sumptuously furnished room, with the casement open, and the sun shining brightly in: for although the autumn was touching upon its close, and winter was nigh at hand, the weather was unusually superb. The grape-vine which climbed up the front of that wing where this apartment was situated, was not as yet denuded of all its leaves—nor had all its clustering fruit been plucked: and although the foliage which did remain, bore the sere autumnal tints it nevertheless proved agreeable to the eye of any one seated in that room. And whom shall we find there? The beautiful Angela—and all alone, too: for Lady Eagledean, with whom she had been

conversing, was summoned forth on some pretext by the Marquis. We say pretext, because it was so; inasmuch as his lordship had a reason for desiring that Miss Deveril should thus be left alone for a few minutes, until a certain person might receive a hint that she was there by herself and that he might seek her if he chose.

Always beautiful—always ravishing, Angela was on this occasion more exquisitely beautiful, if possible, and more irresistibly ravishing than when we last described her. This time it was a white dress that she wore, but fastened up to the throat; for in her raiment she observed a strict virginal propriety. Her hair was in ringlets; and its darkness contrasted with the snowy drapery covering the shoulders and the neck on which those glossy ringlets showered down. The white apparel seemed to set off her exquisite shape to the fullest advantage,—making her seem even taller than she was, and enhancing the sylphid grace of her figure.

She was expecting the return of the Marchioness of Eagledean to the room, when the door opened—and instead of her ladyship, Francis Paton made his appearance. The youth, as the reader is aware, was of the same age as Angela; and we need not say that he was a perfect model of masculine beauty at the time. Indeed it would be difficult to find a more interesting pair than this which that room now contained. The colour heightened somewhat upon Angela's countenance as he made his appearance; while on his cheeks it went and came in rapid transitions; and his heart fluttered like that of the most timid damsel. The reason that Miss Deveril experienced less emotion than he, was because she was totally unsuspecting of what was about to take place: whereas Frank had come with the settled purpose of avowing his love—if he had the courage.

He advanced timidly—and for a few moments was unable to give utterance to a word. At length he said murmuringly, "Miss Deveril, you return to London to-morrow. Some weeks may elapse ere we see each other again—weeks grow into months—and months constitute an age."

"I do not think, Mr. Paton," answered Angela, whose voice was likewise tremulous—and she bent down her eyes as she spoke,—“that months will elapse before I may have the pleasure of visiting

your family again: because his lordship has my brother's promise that the moment the poor woman is enabled to leave our house, we are to pass some weeks with you."

"Oh, you have promised *that*!" exclaimed Francis, enthusiastic pleasure lighting up his countenance. "But still," he almost immediately added, as a partial shade came back upon his femininely handsome features, "even if you were to revisit us in a week, it would be an age—all the same till you did return."

Angela knew not what to say: she felt that she was blushing—her eyes were again bent down—and for a few moments there was a pause, which if not painfully awkward, was at least full of a delicious confusion for both.

"Miss Deveril," suddenly spoke Francis, "you will not be angry with me for what I am about to say? It is with the consent of my parents that I thus address you, Miss Deveril—Angela—I love you—tell me, may I hope?"

Deeper grew the blush upon the maiden's cheeks—so deep that deeper it could not become; and her heart beat audibly. She could not give utterance to a word: but she extended her hand to Frank, who seizing it with rapture, pressed it to his lips. Then, sinking upon his knees at her feet, he exclaimed, "O Angela! you have made me so happy, I know not how to give expression to my feelings. But I love you—Oh! I more than love you—I worship, I adore you: and my life shall be devoted to prove the strength of my affection. I will not ask if I am indifferent to you: were I so, this hand which I hold would not have been proffered me."

"No, Frank," answered the damsel, in a low but serene voice; "you are not indifferent to me. I feel honoured and flattered—But those are cold terms: and I will say that I also am happy."

Again did Francis Paton press to his lips the fair hand which he held in his own; then he rose from his knees—the lovers approached the casement—and there for nearly an hour did they stand in sweet discourse, the pauses of which were filled up with the eloquence of their looks. They heard not the door open: but it did—and the Marquis of Eagledean, accompanied by the Marchioness, remained for a few moments upon the threshold to contemplate that young couple who

were respectively such perfect specimens of the beauty of the two sexes.

Angela was seized with confusion when Lord and Lady Bagledean approached: but Frank, enthusiastic with joy, embraced his parents in gratitude for the hint which they had given him, and the opportunity they had afforded him to avow his love,—by both of which, as the reader has seen, he failed not to profit. The Marquis and Marchioness, welcoming Angela as their future daughter-in-law, embraced her affectionately; and it was soon whispered throughout the mansion that the beautiful Miss Deveril was the destined bride of Francis Paton.

On the following day one of the Marquis's carriages bore William and Angela back to London; and when they had taken their departure, Elizabeth Paton said with an arch smile to her brother, "Now, my dear Frank, since through my intercession our dear parents have allowed you to precipitate matters somewhat and confess your love to Angela, I hope to see your spirits cheer up altogether: and instead of taking solitary rambles, that you will have the kindness to ask me to accompany you."

CHAPTER CXXXVI

MRS. CHESTERFIELD

It may be necessary to observe, for the benefit of some of our readers, that in the immediate vicinity of Paris stands a charming village known by the name of Auteuil—one portion of which is bordered by the Bois de Boulogne—or Anglicising the term, "Boulogne Wood." In this district there are numbers of beautiful villa residences, the gardens and pleasure-grounds of which are so well stocked with evergreens, that even in the middle of winter they have a gay appearance. There is always sufficient verdure to afford a refreshing spectacle to the eye to repose upon: and the more genial climate of France prolongs the duration of Autumn and keeps back the advance of Winter more than in the British Islands.

It is our present purpose to direct the reader's attention to one of these delightful villas in the neighbourhood we have just described; and although it was now the beginning of November, yet

the view from the casements of this residence was pleasing and cheerful. There was a spacious garden attached; and in front, at a short distance, was the Bois de Boulogne. The villa thus stood in a rural seclusion; and if its site and scenery were so agreeable as the cold season approached, the reader may imagine what must be the charms of that spot in the more auspicious periods of the year. The villa belonged to an elderly Frenchman and his wife named Durand—who having saved up some little money by trading pursuits carried on in Paris, retired from business and purchased this little property with the intention of settling down there, and also with the hope of enjoying a serene old age. They had no children, and no near relations; so that when after a time, they began to feel somewhat dull and lonely in this seclusion, after having spent the greater portion of their existence amidst the gaieties, the bustle, and the excitement of the Parisian capital, they had no one whom they could take to reside with them. Under these circumstances, and having several spare rooms in the villa, they determined to let out these apartments, either to a quiet married couple without children—or else to some single person, male or female, requiring such accommodation. Advertisements to this effect were inserted in some of the Parisian newspapers; and the first applicant whom they brought to the villa, was so pleased with the apartments, the situation of the house, and the elderly couple themselves, that she at once took up her residence there.

This was an English lady, who however spoke the French language with an almost perfect fluency. She gave the name of Mrs. Chesterfield; and stated that her husband held an important situation in India, whither he had recently repaired; but that for certain reasons she herself had not accompanied him, it being understood that she should remain in Europe until the decline of the following year, when she purposed to set off and join him in his oriental home. Mrs. Chesterfield was a lady of great beauty—apparently about two or three-and twenty years of age—with dark hair and eyes, a delicate olive tint of complexion, and a superb figure. Her manners were sufficiently aristocratic to denote that she had moved in the highest circles—but yet so fascinating and engaging, when she

thought fit to render them so, that she at once gained the good opinion of the Durands. On taking the apartments for a term of six months, she paid the entire rent in advance—thus rendering references as to respectability quite unnecessary; and indeed such was her appearance, that her bare word would readily have been taken as the surest guarantee for anything she might advance. She paid by means of a cheque on a Parisian banker, signing the name of *Augusta Chesterfield*; and when she arrived at the villa from the hotel where she had been staying, she brought trunks well filled with every variety of the handsomest and most elegant apparel. She had no maid of her own; and therefore an additional female servant was engaged by Madame Durand to attend especially on the beautiful lodger.

It soon became apparent to the elderly couple that Mrs. Chesterfield was not altogether happy; and the keen eye of Madame Durand, with a woman's power of penetration, also observed that she endeavoured to conceal whatsoever cares were gnawing at her heart. Sometimes, when Madame Durand ascended to Mrs. Chesterfield's apartment to receive orders respecting the dinner or other matters, she noticed that the lady was sitting at the window in a mood of deep abstraction—perhaps with a book resting on her lap, but her fine dark eyes gazing vacantly from the window. Then, on being addressed, she would be startled back into self-possession; but the recovery of her composure was instantaneous—and her countenance would become animated with a smile which contrasted strangely with the mournful reverie whence she had been aroused. She received no visits—appeared to have no acquaintances in Paris—and during the first few days of her residence at the villa, received but one letter, which was in a beautiful female hand, and bore the English postmark.

It was the same day on which Mrs. Chesterfield received this letter, that after having perused it, she went forth to walk in the Bois de Boulogne. The weather was serene and beautiful for that season of the year; and the sun was shining brightly in a climate where such mists and fogs as those which are familiar to the dwellers in the British capital, are almost entirely unknown. Mrs. Chesterfield was well but unostentatiously

dressed; there was elegance without pretention in her garb—every detail of her apparel indicated the refined taste of a wellbred lady, without the slightest desire for gaudy show. Yet it was impossible that a woman of her striking beauty and gorgeous developments of shape could fail to attract attention. It was in the forenoon that she was thus rambling forth; and there were but few persons in the road intersecting the wood where she was walking. She herself was plunged in deep thought,—most probably pondering upon the contents of the letter which she had that morning received: and thus for some time she remained unconscious of having become the object of admiration and interest on the part of a young and very handsome gentleman who was mounted on a superb steed.

There was something distinguished in the appearance of this cavalier. Not only, as just stated, was he remarkably handsome and possessed all the advantages of youth—his age not exceeding that of the lady whom he was admiring—but his demeanour was exceedingly prepossessing; and there was a certain mildness in his look, which without detracting from a proper manliness of mien, bespoke an amiable disposition. He was followed by a groom in a neat and elegant livery, and who bestrode an animal well corresponding with the beauty of the steed which carried his master. It was evident by the way in which this gentleman suddenly reined in his horse or catching the first glimpse of Mrs. Chesterfield's figure, as she was walking in front, that he was at once struck by the admirable symmetry of her shape—a shape which, with an almost Hebrew luxuriance, was of perfect proportions. He walked his animal until, having passed her somewhat, he was enabled to obtain a view of her countenance: and the impression made by that face enhanced the admiration already excited by her figure. He could not immediately take his eyes off her; and she was so deeply absorbed in her own reflection that she did not notice how attentive he was surveying her. Suddenly smitten with the conviction that his gaze was of a fixity and an ardor that might be construed into rudeness he reluctantly averted his eyes and quickened the pace of his horse: but he could not for the life of him continue his way with the chance

losing sight of a being who had thus so suddenly taken possession of his heart. He again looked round: still she saw him not: he was enabled therefore to consider her more attentively—and he felt that this lovely unknown had, all unconsciously, become invested with a power over him which he could not possibly shake off. The longer he contemplated her, the more fervid grew his admiration. She appeared faultless in his eyes. With all the straining of hypercriticism—if he were inclined to be thus critical—he could not have wished a single feature to be otherwise than it was, nor a single contour of her shape to be differently modelled. Every one has a particular taste in respect to female beauty: every man has his own *beau idéal* of feminine charms;—and here was a being who in every way, even to the minutest detail, fulfilled that picture of loveliness which the young gentleman had often drawn in his own imagination as the one to be most worshipped and adored.

Still she beheld him not. Again he feared to be considered rude, and even grossly insulting: for she was evidently a well-bred lady—there was nothing in her appearance that could be taken as an encouragement for libertine advances;—and absorbed in thought as she now seemed, it was utterly impossible to perceive in her demeanour the faintest approximation to an overture. But that every pensiveness on her part excited the interest and piqued the curiosity of him who was thus admiring her. Already enamoured of her beauty, he longed to know who she was: he longed likewise to ascertain wherefore she was thus plunged in melancholy thought. He could not therefore hurry away from the spot where she was walking; and yet, if he thus continued reining in his own impatient steed so as not to outstrip her pace, and at the same time keeping his looks so fervently fixed upon her, he would be guilty of a rudeness which was altogether at variance with his sense of good breeding. Reluctantly therefore was he compelled to ride onward: but at a little distance he halted again, and looked back. She had turned—she was retracing her way: the idea of losing sight of her was not to be endured. At any risk he must know more of her: so he turned likewise—and again walking his horse, soon overtook the object of his admiration.

Suddenly she raised her eyes, and beheld his own fixed thus ardently upon her. Her lips, riper and redder than the most luscious of fruit, were slightly apart: he could discern the dazzling brilliancy of her teeth—he saw that she was indeed perfect, in every feature, faultlessly fulfilling his own *beau idéal* of feminine beauty. She averted her eyes—it struck him, with a flush of dignified indignation upon her countenance; and she at once turned into a diverging pathway, which could not be pursued by any one on horse-back. He reined in his steed to look; and sat for a few moments in the saddle irresolute how to act. But promptly making up his mind, he sprang to the ground; and as the groom immediately galloped up, he abandoned his horse to the man's charge,—quickly striking into the same path which the lady had entered.

In a few minutes he was by her side. Mrs. Chesterfield neither looked to the right nor to the left—nor quickened nor slackened her pace—but continued her way with an air as if she were ignorant that she had thus been followed: or else with the modest self-possession of a virtuous woman who chose not to give the slightest encouragement to libertine boldness. The young gentleman longed to address her, but dared not: he passed on—and when a few yards in front, looked back. Mrs. Chesterfield at once turned into another pathway,—so that if he now retraced his own way and followed her, there would be something unmistakably pointed in the proceeding. For a few moments he again stood irresolute: he thought to himself that this was decidedly no adventure offering him any encouragement to persevere with it:—and yet it seemed as if his whole happiness were at stake, so great was the empire which her charms had within a short half-hour established over his heart. He was however no frivolous-minded young man, such as Lord Saxondale: he possessed a loftier intelligence—and yet he had not the moral power to fling off the thralldom which had thus so suddenly enchained him in its meshes.

With a sort of desperate resolve he pursued the lady: he passed her again—he looked round—but with a gaze of the most respectful admiration: and perceiving that she stopped suddenly, as if sorely offended, and was then about to turn and retrace her own

way, he accosted her without farther hesitation.

"For heaven's sake do not be angry, madam!" he said, in a tone of earnest entreaty. "Not for worlds would I give you offence!"

He spoke in the French language, which was his own native tongue: and his looks were full of a deprecating tenderness, as much as to implore that his words and conduct might be favourably interpreted. Mrs. Chesterfield bent the full power of her dark eyes upon him: there was mingled anger and curiosity in that look; and as he thus beheld her close, he saw no need to alter the opinion he had already formed of the dazzling splendour of her beauty.

"If you would not offend me, sir," she answered, after a few moments' pause, "you will at once proceed on your own way and leave me to follow mine:"—and as she also spoke in the French language, it was with that slight foreign accent which proved that France was not her native land.

"My way is yours," returned the young gentleman: "for you lead me by a silken chain from which there is no possibility of self-extrication."

"This, sir," rejoined Mrs. Chesterfield, in a dignified manner, "is not the age of romance, and you are not a knight-errant, with a prescriptive privilege to throw yourself at the feet of any lady whom you may encounter."

"No," he quickly responded, rejoiced at having so far succeeded as to hold her in discourse: "but though the age of knight-errantry may have passed away, the admiration which is due to feminine beauty belongs to all time—and love is confined not to a particular century, but is coeval with eternity itself."

A scarcely perceptible smile appeared upon the rich red lips of Mrs. Chesterfield,—not exactly a smile of scorn nor of anger, but one which was evidently called up by the ingenuity of her persevering admirer's repartee; and his heart glowed with a still deeper fervour, in satisfaction at not having experienced a farther and more pointed repulse.

"You are an English lady," he said. "Not only do I judge by your accents that such is the fact, fluently though you speak my own native language,—but England alone of all European countries can produce such a specimen of grand beauty as yourself."

"I do not thank you, sir, for this compliment," answered Mrs. Chesterfield; "because I hate flattery—and moreover you are holding me in conversation against my will. Decide which path you purpose to take: the other direction will be mine."

"Is it possible that you are resolved to view my conduct with such severity?" he exclaimed, still in a tone and manner of earnest entreaty: and so truly handsome did he appear at the moment, that even the most virtuous female heart could not have remained altogether untouched,—especially as there was nothing of the rakish libertine's insolence in his looks: but the admiration he displayed was invested with the profoundest respect. "I have already implored you not to take offence. At least permit me the pleasure of conversing with you for a few minutes longer."

"If for a few minutes, wherefore not for an hour?" demanded the lady, with a slight and scarcely perceptible archness of look: and as her countenance instantaneously became serious again, she added, "Not for an hour—and therefore not even for another moment."

Thus speaking, she turned and pursued her way quickly. The young Frenchman felt bewildered and excited to almost a maddening degree: the brief discourse already holden with her, had riveted the power of her charms: her voice, rich and full-toned without in the slightest degree transgressing the bounds of feminine harmony, had sunk like a ravishing music into his soul. It was impossible that he could tear himself away: he almost felt as if some slight advantage were already gained; and if he were justified in so thinking, he resolved to follow it up. He was soon by her side again.

"Expend upon me all your indignation, if you will," he said, in a hurried and excited manner; "fling upon me all the lightning of your looks—set me down in your mind as the most audacious of men or the vainest of coxcombs—but enamoured as I have become of your beauty in the space, I may say, of a few brief minutes, I am resolved not to prove altogether indifferent to you! No—I will even force you," he added, vehemently, "to accept the homage of my heart!"

Mrs. Chesterfield once more stopped short: her splendid figure was drawn up to its fullest height: a dignified

elegance characterized it: the crimson mounted to her cheeks—her nostrils dilated—her bust, already so luxuriant, seemed to expand into a still ampler volume; and her flashing looks were flung upon the audacious young Frenchman. She spoke not a word: but she gazed upon him as if to assure herself that he had indeed been bold enough to address her in the style—and perhaps also to put his courage still farther to the test, and see whether he would quail beneath that Juno-like aspect which she assumed.

"Oh! if you mean to play the goddess," he cried, in a sort of mad enthusiasm, "I will cheerfully—Oh, so cheerfully fall down at your feet in worship and adoration!"

"Do you know, sir," said the lady, with a half supercilious, half-compassionate smile, "that I begin to think your intellects are really deranged: for there is something ludicrous in this proceeding on your part. If I were reading it in a book, I should smile over it as a monstrously overstrained sketch: now that it is happening positively and actually before me, I cannot treat it otherwise than by the supposition that its hero must have escaped from a lunatic-asylum."

"Sane in all other respects," responded the young Frenchman, "I may indeed be goaded to madness by the passion with which you have inspired me. Now listen! that very attitude of goddess-like indignation which you just now assumed—that very aspect of ire which, with the mien of the Olympian Queen, you put on—have only exhibited your incomparable charms in a new phase, and rendered me more completely your slave. Aye!" he added, with a sort of fever of exultation, "I could consent to endure taunts—scorn—even the direst outpourings of your wrath, so long as you do but allow me to remain in your presence."

"And pray," demanded Mrs. Cheterfield, who is the audacious individual who is persecuting me thus?"

"I am the Viscount de Chateaufort," he responded: and I may without vanity add that I belong to one of the oldest and wealthiest families of France."

"Most sincerely do I hope," immediately observed Mrs. Cheterfield, "that you have parents who will keep a watchful supervision over you?"

rejoined the Viscount: "they perished when I was a child."

"But you have guardians—you have relations," continued the lady, "who may take care of you?—for heaven knows that you require their attentive watching."

"I am my own master," he answered; "and no one has the power to exercise the slightest control over me."

"I should not have thus remained in discourse with you," observed Mrs. Cheterfield, "did I not really believe that your intellects were slightly unhinged. But if there be no ground for such compassionate feeling on my part, then for the same reason there exists no apology for your conduct; and I beseech—nay, I command that you leave me without further molestation."

"Oh! madam, reject me not thus!" exclaimed the Viscount. "Yes—I am mad—my intellects are unsettled—have your own way—anything—everything you wish or choose to suspect, so long as you permit me to be near you! I am not one of those vain and presumptuous libertines who fancy that they have merely to fling their looks upon a woman in order to captivate her: but the blaze of your beauty burst as it were upon me with a power that was irresistible. I feel towards you as never to any woman did I feel before—Would that this were a land of slavery, that I could be your slave!"

"Now, my Lord Viscount de Chateaufort," said Mrs. Cheterfield, with a coolness which if not actually supercilious, was at least sufficient to damp the ardour and even broke the irritation of the young nobleman if he really did not love her as passionately as he had proclaimed,—“you must confess that you are carrying the romance of the present proceeding to a point at which it becomes ludicrously unnatural and preposterous. I might—indeed, perhaps I ought—to exhibit more anger but with that impression upon my mind, I really have not the heart to visit your silly presumption with any severer evidence of my displeasure—and hope that you will now at once pursue your own path."

"No, lady. By heaven!" he exclaimed, "if love could be chased out of the heart by bitter words, your's would have had that effect. It is not however so with me. I have suddenly entered into a new state of being: I feel as if

duty towards myself,—a duty for the assurance of my own happiness: and it shall be accomplished! I care not at what sacrifice nor at what risk: It is my destiny—and I will fulfil it. No: I will not leave you! By heaven, you shall not remain indifferent to me! My conduct shall be fraught with a perseverance that will compel you to take it as most serious, and not to stigmatize it as puerile silliness. You may invoke the aid of the law against me—you may consign me to prison: but you cannot conquer the feelings of my heart. The term for my release must come: and then would I follow you all over the world—I would find you out, wherever your place of concealment—I would tear you away from the midst of your family—from the embrace of father and mother—aye, even from the arms of a husband—By heaven, lady! you shall be mine—and I swear it!"

Mrs. Chesterfield's countenance gradually grew profoundly serious; and then, mingling with that seriousness, was a certain degree of trouble, as the impassioned Frenchman went on speaking. She looked anxiously around as if to see if succour were nigh: but no one appeared—and they were in the depth of the wood.

"And is it a French nobleman—a French gentleman—a man of honour and of chivalrous mind who thus addresses me?" she asked, her frame trembling visibly. "Suppose, sir, that I do really possess a husband who is devoted to me, and who being absent, places the firmest reliance and the fullest trust in the honour and purity of his wife,—would you compromise me with him?"

"Have you not already gleaned sufficient from my words," exclaimed the Viscount, "to be convinced that you are speaking to a man whom excess of passion has goaded to frenzy? and what will not such a desperate man do? Compromise you with your husband! What does a woman require but the love of a man—a love which is a worship and an adoration? That love shall you have from me. Rest assured that it will far transcend any amount of love with which your husband can regard you. And, Oh! if he be absent—if for a single day—single hour—he could consent to separate himself from such a being as you, it is that he loves you not with one tithe of the fond ardour that my devotedness would

"And do you seriously reflect, M. de Chateaufeuf," asked Mrs. Chesterfield, her dark eyes resting earnestly upon his flushed and excited countenance, "that your words are fraught with a sovereign insult to a virtuous woman? Once more, sir, will you suffer me to depart? I wish for no scene—no exposure—nothing to compromise either of us in the more frequented parts of this resort; and therefore do I counsel you to take one path, and leave me free to choose another. For this reason also I do not abruptly break away from you: because I will not provoke you to hang upon my footsteps, and pursue me in such a manner as will compel me to resent your conduct. You see, sir, that I speak considerately, and even kindly to you under the circumstances: I am willing to forget what has occurred, if you will only suffer me to pursue my way without farther molestation."

"I have already declared," he answered, "that we shall not part thus. I have sworn that I will compel you to regard me with some other feeling beyond indifference——"

"And therefore," interrupted the lady, "you would inspire me with terror."

"No," he rejoined: with love!"

There was a pause, during which Mrs. Chesterfield again seemed bewildered and troubled,—a pause, too, during which her impassioned admirer drank in fresh draughts of fervid love. He was literally intoxicated by the feelings wherewith she had inspired him. All this reasoning on her part only maddened him the more fiercely—rendered him the more desperate. He was brought to that point at which he could commit a crime rather than not succeed in winning her whose grand beauty had so completely ensnared his soul. And now the reader will probably bethink himself of that description which he gave in a recent chapter of the varied modes in which young Cupid takes possession of the human heart: for as in the case of Francis Paton and Angela Deveril, the mischievous god had entered the sacred tabernacle of tender feelings stealthily and gradually—so in the present instance, had he all in a moment stormed the heart of the Viscount de Chateaufeuf.

"I feel so exhausted and overcome," said Mrs. Chesterfield, "by the excitement which for the last hour I have gone through, that in mercy I ask you

"Yes—if you permit me to know where that residence is. It cannot be off," he added, as an idea struck him: or you would not be on foot in this road."

"But she replied, 'what guarantee have I against——'"

"Molestation on my part?" he ejaculated, finishing the sentence for her. Give me but a single hope, however distant—promise that of your own accord you will meet me again: name me the hour and the place—and as a man of honour I swear that those with whom you are residing, shall have no cause to suspect that your beauty has been the heart of an admirer who will never be wearied of giving you proofs of devotedness."

"You place before me, sir," answered the lady, "certain conditions which leave me no alternative. To-morrow at daylight will I be in this spot: but I adjure you to reflect well in the meanwhile, whether you are acting wisely and wisely in respect to yourself—honourably and chivalrously in respect to me. And now, sir, if you follow at a convenient distance, you will see where I reside."

A look of profound gratitude, totally mingled with overhearing triumph, beamed upon the countenance of the young nobleman: he felt that he had secured a material point—hope was burning in his breast—and with his glances he thanked that splendid woman for having driven him to despair. She turned and walked in the direction of the sands' villa: she did not look back—she knew that the Viscount de Chateaufort was following at a certain distance. She reached the gate of the enclosure in the midst of which the villa stood; and as she rang the bell, she did not pause for a single moment. The count was amongst the trees—and though visible to her, yet beyond the range of view commanded by the windows. He raised his hat in respectful salutation—tarried there till he saw that she really entered the house—and then, going deeper into the wood, remained lying in concealment for at least an hour, to assure himself that she did not come forth again. For he thought it not possible that she might have merely stood there upon some pretext, so as to baffle herself of his importunities. But she passed: she did not make her appearance; and through an opening

glimpse of her as she passed one of the windows of her principal room on the first floor. Then he felt assured that she was really and truly an inmate of that house; and he hastened away with a heart full of exultation.

CHAPTER CXXXVII.

THE VISCOUNT DE CHATEAUNEUF.

PUNCTUALLY at noon on the following day, Augusta Chesterfield repaired to the appointed spot. The weather was again exceedingly beautiful and remarkably mild. The sun was shining—and there was a certain degree of warmth in the air which produced the impression of Spring's advent rather than of stern Winter's near approach. Mrs. Chesterfield was dressed with perhaps still more elegance than on the preceding day; and certainly her beauty was of a very superior character. The masses of her raven hair hung in long luxuriant tresses beneath the bewitching Parisian bonnet that she wore: her dress, of rustling glossy silk, fitted tight to her shape,—thus developing in well defined reliefs and in rounded outlines the rich contours of her form. As the pathway had grass on either side, and was exceedingly narrow—and the herbage might be damp—she raised her dress somewhat, as ladies are wont to do; thus affording a glimpse of the shapely foot and the well turned ankle. There was a slight flush upon her countenance—the mantling of a carnation hue beneath the delicate olive of her pure skin; and her eyes appeared to swim in a lustrous languor.

The Viscount de Chateaufort was at the rendezvous—which indeed he had reached half-an-hour before the appointed time; and on this occasion he had come on foot, so as to avoid the possibility of having his actions spied by the groom who had accompanied him on the preceding day. The moment he beheld the object of his adoration approach, he flew towards her; and before she had time to prevent the action—if she had the inclination—he had caught her delicately gloved hand and pressed it in rapture to his lips.

"You have come," he exclaimed, in a tone of fervid exultation! "You have come—you have kept your word—there

"Yes—I have come, my lord," she answered, quickly withdrawing her hand, and speaking in a very serious tone: "but it was with the expectation of finding that you had thought better of your yesterday's folly, and that in order to make amends you would not be here to-day."

"Then you understood me not! you comprehended not the passion with which your charms had inspired me! Oh, believe me when I declare that not for one single moment has your image been absent from my mind. Not once did I close my eyes in slumber last night: I lay thinking of you—I did not wish to sleep—my reverie was delicious. I knew that you would come to-day: I had no doubt of it! I felt that such a love as that which I cherished towards you, could not fail to inspire at least some small amount of compassion—some trifling degree of sympathy—some particle of interest. You must have reflected that a man who offers to devote himself entirely to you—to elevate you in his heart's tabernacle as the idol of his worship—is not one whose love is to be treated with indifference. All this I said to myself; and therefore I knew that you would come."

"And is it possible," asked Mrs. Chesterfield "that you are still in this frame of mind? What am I to do to reason you into a more rational course? Did I not tell you that I was married?"

"And I did not assure you in return that no husband shall bar me from you? But he is absent—he neglects the treasure that he possesses——"

"Speak not of him thus," interrupted the lady: "he is on his way to India, whither imperious duties summon him."

"To India!" echoed the Viscount, enthusiastic joy lighting up his features, and rendering them so supremely handsome that the lady's countenance flushed with a deeper dye and her eyes swam in a more voluptuous lustre, as she gazed upon him. "To India, say you? Then has he left the arena open for another competitor to carry off the prize! To India?—and he could leave you behind him! Oh, he loves you not!—believe me, he loves you not—while I offer you the devotion of the tenderest heart and the adoration of a whole lifetime!"

The lady gave no answer—but bent down her looks as she walked slowly by the side of the impassioned young Viscount. He gazed upon her—that

of that gloriously handsome countenance which was thus bent down-ward: he gazed upon her with rapture and with hope! Then his eyes slowly wandered over the sweeping length of her magnificent shape; and he felt that he could seize her in his arms—he could cover her lips, her cheeks, and her brow with kisses. But he dared not yet go thus far: and yet he saw that his triumph was assured. For if she intended to reject him altogether, why did she continue silent now? why did she keep her looks bent down? why was she evidently reflecting? Ah! says not the old proverb that the woman who deliberates is lost?—and was she not deliberating at that moment?

"Tell me—tell me," he said, after a long pause; "that I am not altogether indifferent to you."

"I know not how to address you," she answered, in a low murmuring voice, as she gently raised her blushing countenance. "If I beseech you to leave me, you will not; and if I were to fly stealthily away from Paris, you would pursue me. If I invoke the aid of the law—which perhaps is my duty—I nevertheless feel that it would be a too cruel punishment for the love which you proclaim, and which seems to have become your master. In every way, therefore, do I find myself compromised with you. Four-and-twenty hours have elapsed since we parted; you have had leisure to reflect upon what yesterday took place—and yet you are still the same. The strength of your passion is thus shown—I cannot doubt it: and it were to take the highest stand on the pedestal of female pride—or shall I say to fall into the very extreme of female affectation?—if I were to declare that I am neither flattered nor complimented by the tribute of such a love as this."

The Viscount de Chateaufort, literally trembling with the thrill of ecstasy and wild delight which she through his frame, seized the lady's hand again—pressed it in his own—and this time found that it was not immediately withdrawn. As he thus pressed it too, he fancied that it quivered somewhat to his touch: he likewise thought that the color heightened upon her cheeks—and that therefore she herself was not inaccessible.

his own heart. He offered her his arm; and she took it,—her hand however not leaning upon it, but merely resting there light as if it were a feather.

"I will not therefore say," she continued, in the same low murmuring voice as before, "that I am altogether indifferent to the proof of love which you have offered me: but still I feel as if standing on the brink of a precipice into which one false step will precipitate me, and whence all return is impossible. Now, M. de Chateauneuf, it is no light thing for you to seek the accomplishment of this immense change in my circumstances: nor can I consent, as if it were a moment of frenzy, to rush blindly and precipitately on such a new phase of existence. Let not our present interview be prolonged: it is for you to regard it as a proof that whatsoever may promise will be faithfully fulfilled."

"Promise me, therefore," exclaimed the young nobleman, "that to-morrow, at the same hour and the same place, you will meet me. Promise me this—and I am your slave, ready to obey you in all things."

"I promise," answered Mrs. Chesterfield. "And now leave me—Go—let us separate: and above all things, take care how you compromise me at the respectable dwelling where I am residing."

"Compromise you!" ejaculated the Viscount, as if he thought the injunction seemed to throw a damp upon his hopes. "Assuredly I will not seek your presence until I receive your full permission: but when you come to know me better—if then you catch more of the inspiration of that love which I feel for you,—if then, I say, you decide upon abandoning yourself altogether unto me, you will have to dare the opinion of the world—you will become what is called *compromised*; and from this you must not shrink. Do you understand me? It is no mere passing intrigue of gallantry which I propose: I should loathe myself if I were capable of offering you such an insult: I should loathe you if you were capable of accepting it. No:—what I require of you is the utter and total annihilation of all other ties; so that when your husband returns from India, he may not find you ready to receive him with open arms—but he may know the treasure he left behind him has fallen into the possession of one who is

better capable of appreciating it. I have wealth—immense wealth; and it shall be laid at your feet. Of my rank, under circumstances, I cannot make you the sharer: our union cannot be sanctified at the altar;—but the ties which are to bind us, shall be strengthened by the fondest love. And now you understand me: and you promise that to-morrow, at this hour and on this spot, we shall meet again?"

"I promise," was the reply faintly and murmuringly given.

"And the name of her whom I adore?" said the young nobleman: what name is that I may breathe incessantly with the secret voice of my heart until we meet again?"

"Augusta Chesterfield," was the response. "And now that you have my promise, let us separate."

"Farewell, then, for the present, my own worshipped Augusta!"—and M. de Chateauneuf would have strained her to his breast; but she sped away from him in the direction of the Durand's villa.

On this occasion, however, she *did* look back for a moment; and she made a sign of adieu—so that the young nobleman was enabled to congratulate himself that the circumstances of their parting on the present occasion were far more favourable to his hopes than those of the preceding day.

In the afternoon Mrs. Chesterfield took an opportunity to walk with Madame Durand in the garden attached to the villa; and during a pause in the conversation, she observed, as if quite casually, "There are in this neighbourhood several very fine mansions: I presume that they are occupied by the *elite* of your nobility and gentry?"

Madame Durand particularized several; and being of a loquacious disposition, she entered into minute details relative to the reputed incomes and family circumstances of those persons concerning whom she was speaking.

"You behold that beautiful white chateau standing on yonder eminence about a mile distant?" she continued. "It belongs to the Viscount de Chateauneuf—a very wealthy young nobleman, and as handsome as he is rich."

"I think I have heard the name mentioned before," said Mrs. Chesterfield.

"Oh! it is a time-honoured name in

the history of the French Aristocracy," proceeded Madame Durant. "True, our Aristocracy is nothing now-a-days: two revolutions and the charter of 1830 have stricken down the *prestige* of nobility—and no great harm either. Therefore great names are only estimated now if associated with great wealth—which is the case with M. de Chateauneuf. But then," added the landlady, "the riches came by marriage, and were not already in his own family, which was very much impoverished——"

"Then this nobleman," observed Mrs. Chesterfield, stooping down to pick up her pocket-handkerchief,—this young nobleman of whom you are speaking, is married?"

"Oh! yes!—he has been married for the last two years—and he obtained that beautiful chateau and the annexed estate, together with another chateau and another estate somewhere in the south of France, and an income of five hundred thousand francs* a year, *all* by this matrimonial alliance. I will tell you how it was," continued the garrulous Madame Durand. "There was a very opulent sugar-baker who retired from business some three or four years ago. He was a widower, and had an only child—a daughter named Stephanie. This young lady is exceedingly beautiful—one of the most perfect and angelic creatures you ever saw in your life—highly educated and brilliantly accomplished—of distinguished manners too—and elegant deportment. Now, I must tell you that sugar-baker was a vulgar, coarse-mannered, repulsive person—very fond of the bottle—and when in his cups, most outrageously insulting to all his guests. The consequence was that, after retiring from business and mingling in the gay circles of fashion for a few months, he was completely shunned; and being turned out of good society, entailed the same penalty upon his hapless and innocent daughter. His ambition was to make for her a splendid match; and thus he suddenly found all his hopes, as he feared, completely frustrated. How was he to get back into society? how to accomplish his aim on Stephanie's behalf? One of the few friends who remained to him suggested a means. 'You, my good fellow,' he said to the sugar-baker, 'can give your daughter a

fortune: you need not therefore look out for a young nobleman or gentleman who has a fortune likewise; because with such advantages of his own, no such individual would under present circumstances espouse Mademoiselle Stephanie. What you require, therefore, is a young nobleman of brilliant connexions, ancient family, but no wealth; and who will consent to wed your daughter for her riches. Such a son-in-law would be able, by his position, to a certain extent to rule the opinion of society in your favour.'—The sugar-baker readily accepted this advice; the kind friend undertook to find such a nobleman as was wanted; and the impoverished scion of the Chateauneuf family was the fortunate individual thus selected. Accordingly, after a courtship of six weeks, Mademoiselle Stephanie became Viscountess de Chateauneuf. I must however observe that the young nobleman would not consent to any particular formality of marriage-settlements and so forth: he was resolved to have the whole control over whatsoever fortune his wife might bring him; and the sugar-baker was too eager to have the dream of his darling ambition fulfilled, to throw any obstacles in the way. Poor man! when once he was again introduced into society, and tolerated there as the father-in-law of the young and brilliant Viscount de Chateauneuf, he did not long survive the intoxication of his joy; and in a fit of another species of intoxication was suddenly cut off."

"And the young couple," said Mrs. Chesterfield inquiringly,—“are they much attached to each other?”

"Can it be supposed," asked Madame Durand, "that such an alliance should prove a very happy one? The Viscount is a sufficiently amiable young man: but it appears that he has conceived something bordering upon an aversion for his wife. Perhaps it is that his pride is wounded in being constantly reminded by circumstances that he owes all he possesses to the sugar-baker's daughter. Perhaps he feels that he sold himself, as it were, to the selfish ambition of a vulgar upstart: or perhaps there may be some infirmity of temper on his own part, with which the world is not generally acquainted. Certain it is, however, that with all his other good qualities—and I believe that he has several—he

* £ 20,000 sterling, in English money.

"And does she pine at this treatment?" asked Mrs. Chesterfield: does she resent it? or is she indifferent to it?"

"Have they any children?" inquired the English lady.

"Then, I presume," observed Mrs. Chesterfield, with an air of careless indifference, as if she were merely talking for conversation's sake,— "that he Viscount seeks indemnification for domestic unhappiness, in the dissipations of your gay capital?"

"No," replied Madame Durand: "and this is one of the most remarkable phases in his character. So far from being dissipated, he is particularly steady: his chief amusement is riding on horseback—and he may frequently be seen cantering on a splendid steed, and followed by a groom in an elegant livery, through the adjacent wood. Whether he may have a mistress or not, I cannot say."

Here the discourse terminated, as a servant came forth to announce that dinner was served up.

The Viscount de Chateaufort was earlier than the appointed hour at the spot; and as on the preceding day, he had been waiting some little time, when the object of his passion made her appearance. He however had felt assured that she would not disappoint him—that she would keep her word—and that she would come. Handsome as she had appeared to him before, she was now, if possible, handsomer than ever in his eyes; and if she had studiously and deliberately intended to consolidate the empire which she had won over his heart, she certainly might congratulate herself on the fullest success.

"Adorable Augusta!" said the young nobleman, hastening towards her: but to his surprise and dismay, she suddenly assumed a cold and distant look, and held back the hand which he attempted in rapture to seize.

"My lord," she said, "you have do-

I explain to you my position—that I was married——”

“Forgive me, Augusta—forgive me!” exclaimed the Viscount, becoming terribly agitated: “but I had not the courage to tell you yesterday that I also am married. On my soul, that avowal would have been conveyed in almost the very first words issuing from my lips on the present occasion!”

“You did wrong thus to deceive me,” said Mrs. Chesterfield: “for deception it really was. You should have been candid at once, and not have suffered me to learn by the accident of conversation that such is the case. Do not think for a moment that I have been purposely prying into your affairs. No—heaven forbid! I thought you were all frankness and candour; and I received as gospel whatever fell from your lips.”

“And not in one single word have I deceived you!” exclaimed the Viscount with impassioned vehemence. “It is true that I withheld a fact: but have misrepresented nothing. I gave you the assurance of my fervid and devoted love; and heaven is my witness how truthfully I spoke in all that I thus said. If not, wherefore am I here now? And when I yesterday bade you reflect that there were sacrifices which you would have to make,—think you that I had not in view certain sacrifices on my own side? Think you that if you would have to surrender a husband, I had not already made up my mind to surrender a wife? Did I not expressly and emphatically declare that, although I could place my wealth at your feet, yet that I could not make you the sharer of my rank? And how can this discovery of my marriage constitute any difference between us, inasmuch as even if I were unmarried, you could not accompany me to the altar?”

“Perhaps,” responded Augusta Chesterfield, “I had a certain prospect in view while deliberating whether I should accept your proposals: perhaps I reasoned to myself that if I sacrificed everything for you, a divorce might be obtained between my husband and myself, and that then you would make me your wife. But now, under existing circumstances, the sacrifice you ask me to make is far greater than I regarded it while deeming you unmarried. Therefore,” added Mrs. Chesterfield, in a firm voice, and bending upon the Viscount an equally decisive look, “I have met you here now to proclaim

emphatically and peremptorily, that everything is at an end between us. As a man of honour you will never breathe to a living soul that for a single moment I had the weakness to give ear to your words——”

“My God, Augusta, speak not thus!—my own adored Augusta!”—and the Viscount appeared the very image of despair. “Recall those dreadful words!—they are my doom—my death knell! Oh, that the same lips from whence you learnt the secret of my marriage, should have forbore to tell you that it was an unhappy one! Or perhaps that much was likewise explained to you? If not I declare it now. I never loved her who bears the name of my wife: I never loved before until I beheld you. Oh! mine is a heart that craved an object whereon to bestow all the immensity of that love whereof it is capable; and my imagination had often depicted the *beau idéal* of her whom I could thus love passionately and adoringly. There was a void in this heart of mine to be filled up; and therefore was it that the very first moment my eyes settled upon you, I beheld the idol of my imagination—the *beau idéal* for which I yearned—the object which could alone occupy that place in my heart! Augusta, will you refuse such a love as this? No, you will not—you will not—it is impossible! I see that your looks are melting—their severity is dissipating—you will not drive me to despair!”

“What am I to do?—Oh, what am I to do?” said Mrs. Chesterfield murmuringly, with all the appearance of one who was cruelly bewildered how to act.

“What are you to do?” cried Chateaufort, seizing both her hands and pressing them in his own: “what are you to do? You are to breathe the word which will confirm my happiness and thereby give me the means of ensuring your own!”

“Ensuring my own happiness?” said Augusta, in a musing strain. “Oh! it is a tremendous risk that I run in abandoning my husband for the sake of you! Yes—it is a risk which I dare not encounter—there is a reason——”

“And that reason?” ejaculated the Viscount de Chateaufort, full of the most anxious suspense.

“It is that by remaining faithful to my husband”

field averting her head, "I secure a name for the child which I bear in my bosom: but if I surrender myself into your arms—"

"I will be a father to your child!" responded the Viscount, in a low voice, but replete with a concentrated joy that he was enabled thus to remove the last scruple which appeared to exist in the mind of his adored one.

"Then I am your's," she answered: and she resisted not, when rapturously catching her in his arms, he strained her to his breast.

CHAPTER CXXXVIII.

THE ANATOMICAL MUSEUM.

It was midnight—midnight in the dull and gloomy month of November: and neither moon nor star peened forth from the leaden sky. A drizzling rain was falling, so that the street lamps looked as if seen through a mist; and no one was abroad, save those whom duty or necessity, or other urgent circumstances, compelled to remain exposed to the inclement atmosphere. The tall stiff policemen, wrapped in their great coats, wore their oil-skin capes: the daughters of crime stood shivering in doorways; and wretched mendicants endeavoured to draw their rags more closely around them.

The hour of twelve was being proclaimed by the countless tongues of Time throughout the metropolis as Chiffin the Cannibal entered Conduit Street. His rent shaggy coat was buttoned close: his slouching white hat was drawn as much over his countenance as possible; and a dingy red "comforter," encircling his throat, reached up to his very nose. His hands were in his capacious coat-pockets,—the right one clutching the end of his club, which reaching up to his armpit, was thus concealed by the curve of the arm itself. He walked quickly—did Mr. Chiffin the Cannibal: or, as the reader may suspect, he was out on important business.

Turning up a narrow alley which lay between two houses and communicated with a mews, or large stabling-yard, Chiffin proceeded with the unhesitating confidence of one well acquainted—or, at all events, well instructed in the topography of the spot. Another diverging alley

brought him to the back of the particular premises which he sought; and although there was a door in the boundary-wall, he paused not to force it open—but speedily scaled the wall itself. He was now in a garden of tolerably spacious dimensions considering how thickly that quarter was studded with dwellings: indeed it was the only garden of that size in the entire neighbourhood.

"Old Bob Shakerly assured me there wasn't no dog," muttered Chiffin to himself, as he threaded the garden-walk: but still he kept his club in readiness to deal a ferocious blow should any such defensive animal rush forward to attack him.

On gaining the rear of the habitation, Chiffin found—as he had been led to expect—that a few steps descended into a sort of area, in which stood the door opening into the kitchen-premises: while over this area, and in the angle which one of the garden-walls formed with the house, there was a narrow ascending flight of about a dozen stone steps leading to another door.

"Old Bob Shakerly said as how this would be the best," again muttered the Cannibal to himself: and he forthwith mounted those steps last alluded to.

It was almost completely dark in the garden,—no lamp being there to shed a ray upon the scene, and no moon nor star, as already stated, appearing on the face of heaven. But the lynx-eyes of the Cannibal had no difficulty in embracing every feature of the premises; and thus did he proceed without delay or hesitation in the prosecution of his task. Besides, it was evident enough, from his own occasional mutterings, that he had been well tutored by old Bob Shakerly, who though having pocketted scores of Dr. Ferney's guineas, had not scrupled to sell his knowledge of the physician's premises for the bribe which his friend Chiffin had offered him.

The Cannibal's pockets contained all the requisite implements for house-breaking; and in this process he had a most wonderful experience. The door was therefore speedily forced open, and in so noiseless a manner that it could not have been heard by any one a dozen yards off. Chiffin was now inside Dr. Ferney's habitation. He listened—and all was silent. One of his pockets furnished a lantern of the description denominated a "darky" by persons of the Cannibal's fraternity:

and this was soon lighted by means of a noiselessly striking lucifer match. The Cannibal found himself, as he had been led to expect, in a small passage communicating with a private staircase; and up this staircase he forthwith began to ascend. Every now and then he stopped and listened: but all was still silent. His club was under his arm—one hand carried the lantern—the other, thrust into a pocket, clutched a pistol: so, that should anything happen to menace his safety, this desperate character was fully prepared for such an event.

He gained the second storey: but here he suddenly found himself at fault. Old Shakerly had described to him the arrangements of the house just as he himself had been for years acquainted with them: he had told Chiffin which was the doctor's bedchamber—where the museum and laboratory were situated—where the servants slept—and where the spare rooms might be searched for: and it was these spare rooms that Chiffin had proposed to visit,—naturally supposing that in one of them Lord Saxondale would be located. He carried in his head a complete map, so to speak, of Dr. Ferney's dwelling, according to old Shakerly's acquaintance therewith. Why then was he at fault? For the simple reason that the alterations which the physician had caused to be made when about to take lunatic-patients, had changed the aspect of the landing on the second floor: so that the Cannibal knew not in what direction to proceed. Where he expected to find doors, there was a partition-wall; and where he looked for a wall, there were doors. In short, the whole arrangements, as described to him by Shakerly, were reversed; and the light of his lantern showed him that these changes were entirely new—therefore unknown to his informant.

What was now to be done? He dared not remain loitering or deliberating there: and if he proceeded at random, he might enter a wrong room and alarm the whole house. But Chiffin was not the man to retreat when money was to be gained: and he resolved to continue his work at a venture. He tried the nearest door: it yielded to his touch—and the light of his lantern showed him a narrow passage. Comparing the position of this passage with the arrangements described to him by Shakerly, he fancied that it

must lead to the spare apartments. He accordingly entered it—and tried another door at the extremity. This also proved to be open; and that it was so, must be attributed to an oversight on the part of Dr. Ferney himself—for this door communicated with a suite of apartments which the physician was almost invariably in the habit of keeping carefully closed.

Where was it, then, that the Cannibal thus found himself? In the museum of physiological curiosities, anatomical preparations, and waxen effigies. For a moment, as the light of the lantern revealed these horrors to the Cannibal's gaze, he was seized with the consternation of terror: but this effect was not likely to remain long upon the mind of such a hardened, desperate, care nothing individual as he:—and the feeling was therefore quickly succeeded by one of curiosity. He stopped short, and looked around him. Here an Egyptian mummy, standing upright in its coffin-like box, met his view through the glass door: there a corpse, embalmed by Ferney's own hand, and wrapped in a shroud, glared upon the Cannibal with its dull glassy eyes. Wherever his looks settled, it was to alight upon some hideous object—some ghastly spectacle—or some monstrous curiosity. He passed on into the adjacent room, impelled by a feeling which he himself could scarcely understand. Here an array of embalmed heads upon a shelf first arrested his vision: then his gaze settled on a skull grinning on a table. He looked around: two waxen effigies, as large as life—representing human shapes afflicted with dire and loathsome diseases—appeared in their glass fronted cases. Jars, also of transparent glass, containing infant monsters, were in another part of the room; and a colossal skeleton, with one of its fleshless arms extended, next arrested his attention. But, Ah! over what other object did this gigantic atomy appear to be keeping guard?—was that a living man standing in a coffinlike case, and seen through the glass door? or was it some fresh object of horror apparelled in the raiment of a gentleman? Chiffin, still impelled by that same irresistible feeling of curiosity, drew nearer; and holding up his lantern, threw its rays completely upon this object in its receptacle. Dismay and terror seized upon him; a subdued cry of consternation escaped his lips—for it was Ralph Farefield that

seemed thus to be gazing forth at the Cannibal!

The club fell from Chiffin's hand; and it was a marvel that the other still retained the lantern; but the handle thereof did his fingers clutch with convulsive force, as if some intuitive spell prevented him from losing the light which showed him that pale countenance on which his dismayed and horrified looks were riveted. Yes; there stood Ralph Farefield—to all appearance as if he had not been dead a day—the same as Lady Saxondale had seen him when, a few months back, she was introduced to the mysteries of this museum. There he stood—that same Ralph Farefield whom Chiffin had known upwards of nineteen years ago, dressed, too, in the garb he was accustomed to wear, and with nothing to indicate that he was dead save the wax-like pallor of his countenance and the dull fixed stare of the glassy eyes! There he stood—the corpse of that man who had been one of Chiffin's earliest patrons in the sphere of crime. No wonder that the recognition should have smitten even that desperate and hardened ruffian with horror and dismay—so unexpected was the spectacle—so ominous appeared to be its presence there! But not long lasted the impression thus made upon the mind of the Cannibal.

"It is but a dead'un," he muttered to himself; and picking up his club, he flung his rapid looks around to assure himself that nothing moved—no one was behind him; for there was still a sort of vague terror, though rapidly dissipating, hovering in his soul.

He now advanced close up to the case which stood by the colossal skeleton of the Russian giant; and he surveyed the corpse of Ralph Farefield with an earnest attention. He forgot, for the moment, the purport of his visit to this house—forgot that time was flying and that he had still much work to do. As he stood gazing on the corpse, it almost seemed as if it were becoming animated with a real life, and that it meant to address him. Its eyes seemed to glare as if vital existence were slowly lighting up within them; the lips appeared to move as if a deep hollow voice were about to come forth from the throat. But these effects were only caused by the

oscillating play of the light upon the features; and Chiffin knew that it was so. Still, as he remained riveted there by a sort of spell, he again felt as if there were something ominous in his thus encountering the dead of other times. It looked as if his former patron in iniquity stood there to warn him that his own career was drawing to an end, and that the time was short ere he would meet that *other* who had gone to the world beyond the grave upwards of nineteen years back!

It was with a sort of desperate effort that the Cannibal tore himself away; but as he reached the door, he could not help looking over his shoulder to assure himself that Ralph Farefield was not following him. On entering the next room—the first of the suite constituting the anatomical museum—Chiffin drew forth a flask from his pocket, and poured a copious draught of brandy down his throat. It appeared to do him good; or, in other words, it revived all the hardihood of the finished ruffian. Now he was once more equal to the task which he had in hand.

Issuing forth from the museum, and threading the passage, the Cannibal was again on the landing—again too, bewildered which direction to take. But now it suddenly struck him that the altered arrangements of that part of the doctor's dwelling must have been effected for the reception of lunatic patients; and he naturally judged that the apartments assigned to them would look towards the rear of the premises, so that the iron bars at the windows should not afford an unsightly spectacle in the street-front. Guided by this conjecture, Chiffin proceeded to try one of the newly constructed doors. It opened; he peeped in—and at the same instant a man, who was lying in a bed there, started up. The light of the lantern streamed full upon his features; and Chiffin at once saw that it was not the countenance of Lord Saxondale. Quick as thought did the ruffian's club descend upon the head of the man thus started from his sleep; and the stunning blow arrested the cry of alarm which was about to burst forth from his lips. He sank back insensible upon his pillow: but the experienced eye of Chiffin saw that he was not dead—merely stupefied by the blow he had received. Not that the Cannibal would have cared overmuch if the consequences had been of a more fatal character.

The man thus disposed of, was in reality a keeper whom Dr. Ferney had hired in the course of that day, soon after his interview with Lady Saxondale,—this interview, as the reader will recollect, having resulted in the complete triumph of that wily woman over the physician, who had accordingly promised that Lord Saxondale should remain beneath his roof. Immediately upon having dealt the blow which thus effectually stunned the keeper, Chiffin the Cannibal looked into the adjoining room, the intervening door being open. There he beheld young Lord Saxondale, lying fast asleep in the couch.

A grim smile of satisfaction now appeared upon the features of the Cannibal: for he felt assured that his night's work would be crowned with triumph. Throwing back a look to ascertain that the keeper continued in a state of unconsciousness, Chiffin passed into the chamber where Edmund slept; and laying his hand upon the young nobleman's shoulder, he shook him gently. Edmund opened his eyes; and of a surety the countenance of the Cannibal, seen by the light of the lantern, was no very agreeable spectacle to greet the first regards of any individual so waking up. Awful dismay seized upon Lord Saxondale: he was stricken speechless with consternation;—and this was fortunate for the scheme then in progress, inasmuch as everything would have been spoilt if the cry which rose to his very lips had found vent.

"You have nothing to fear, my lord," said Chiffin in a whisper, albeit a hoarse one—and likewise in as reassuring a tone as he could possibly adopt. "I know I am not a very great beauty——"

"But who *are* you?" inquired Edmund, now recovering just a sufficiency of courage to break the seal which horror and dismay had in the first instance set upon his lips: for perhaps it will be as well to remind the reader that when the scene took place some months back at Madge Somers' cottage in the neighbourhood of the Seven Sisters' Road, Lord Saxondale did not behold the Cannibal at all; and therefore his features were now utterly unfamiliar to him.

"Who am I? Why, a friend of your'n," at once responded Chiffin.

"A friend?" echoed Saxondale,

recoiling with visible horror; and he trembled likewise with apprehension.

"Well, at least I am employed by some gentlemen which is interested in you," resumed the Cannibal: "so don't be frightened—but get up quick—put on your fogger—and let's be off."

"Is this possible?" exclaimed Edmund, joy and hope suddenly springing up in his soul.

"You will see my lord, it's so possible that a post chaise-and-four is waiting for you in the Square. Jump up, I say, and look sharp."

"But the keeper?"

"He's all right!"—and the Cannibal displayed his club significantly.

"You—you—have not mur—mur—murdered him?" asked Edmund, with stammering speech; and his countenance was white as a sheet.

"Not I! Don't be afraid, my lord: only a gentle tap on his scone, just to mend his manners a bit. But you get up; and I will go and stand by the feller, so as to give him another tap if he opens his eyes too soon."

Thus speaking, Chiffin returned into the other room; and Edmund, springing out of bed, proceeded to huddle on his garments. He naturally longed to ask his liberator a thousand questions,—who the gentlemen were to whom he alluded as his employers,—whether he was to be taken,—how Chiffin himself had got into the house, &c., &c., but he felt there was no time to pause for such a purpose; and moreover the Cannibal, being at the extremity of the other room, was at too great a distance to be spoken to otherwise than with a certain degree of loudness; and this would be dangerous to the enterprise. On the other hand, Chiffin himself was stationed close by the keeper's couch—one hand grasping the club in readiness to deal another blow, if needful; and his left hand holding the lantern in such a way as to fling its beams on the man's feature. But fortunately for the keeper, he remained in a perfect state of unconsciousness until Lord Saxondale had finished dressing: for it was by no means certain that a second blow if dealt by the Cannibal, would have been so comparatively innocuous as the first.

In less than three minutes Edmund was dressed: never in all his life had he appalled himself in so short a time; and yet his hands trembled—indeed his entire form quivered—with the most nervous anxiety and suspense.

"Now, my lord, follow me," said Chiffin; "and mind you tread just as if you was walking on eggs. I feel pretty certain this chap"—pointing to the keeper—"will remain quite for a couple of minutes or so; and that's all the time we shall want."

They issued forth from the chamber: noiselessly they stole along—the private staircase was descended—and they reached the garden. Edmund, who in the meanwhile had continued in almost a frightful state of trembling nervousness, now felt as if he began to breathe the air of freedom; and when the Cannibal helped him to scale the wall and he alighted in the lane outside the barrier, he could scarcely prevent himself from sending forth an exultant cry to celebrate his escape.

"This way, my lord," said Chiffin, who had speedily clambered over the wall after Edmund: and he led him into Hanover Square.

There they perceived a post chaise—and-four waiting at a little distance—and two gentlemen, muffled in cloaks, standing near it.

"It's all right," said the Cannibal, approaching Mr. Lawson and Count de St. Gerard: here's his lordship."

"To whom am I indebted for so much kind interest?" ejaculated Edmund, rushing forward to seize the hands of the French nobleman and his English friend.

"No matter, my lord—no matter," quickly responded Lawson: "another time, perhaps, you will know—indeed, your wife will give you sufficient explanations: for you must hasten and join her ladyship at Saxondale Castle."

"Ah! my wife?—she has done this? and she is in Lincolnshire?"

"Yes, my lord," replied Lawson, in the same hasty manner as before: "and you are enjoined to proceed with the utmost speed to meet her there. She has a conversation with your mother, who is in London; and it is of vital consequence to your interests that you should see her ladyship—your wife I mean—without delay."

Thus speaking, Mr. Lawson pushed Saxondale into the post-chaise, which instantaneously drove rapidly off. It will be observed that the Count de St. Gerard took no part in this conversation: nor did he make himself known to the young nobleman. The reader will fully comprehend and appreciate his delicacy

not because he thus remained silent and suffered his friend Lawson to be the spokesman, that he was an uninterested witness of the successful result of the Cannibal's enterprise at Dr. Ferney's House.

"Now, my man," said Lawson, turning towards Chiffin the moment the post-chaise had driven away, "you have acquitted yourself so admirably in the business entrusted to you, that you merit a liberal reward; and it shall be forthcoming. We said something about fifty guineas—and I believe you had a few in advance. But this purse contains a hundred: and now we have nothing more to do with each other. Good night to you, Mr. Brown."

"Good night, gentlemen—and thank'ee kindly," responded the Cannibal, as he pocketted the heavy purse which sent forth the familiar chink of gold pieces.

He now made the best of his way, by the most secluded route, towards Hammersmith,—purposing to remain at the sign of the *Three Cudgers* until his arrangement for embarkation should be completed. He reached the neighbourhood where the boozing-ken was situated: it was now verging towards three in the morning, but was still quite dark in that November season. He was entering the narrow street at the extremity of which the *Three Cudgers* stood,—when, by the light of a lamp, he suddenly found himself face to face with Tony Wilkins.

CHAPTER CXXXIX

THE TWO MURDERERS

It was thus that Chiffin the Cannibal and Tony Wilkins met:—thus unexpectedly did they encounter each other. Both stopped short: an ejaculation, not loud, but subdued and gloomy, escaped the lips of each. Then there was a pause; and they stood eyeing each other by the light of that lamp which had mutually revealed their features. Both felt that some terrible crisis was at hand; and yet neither appeared exactly to comprehend what was to be done—nor how whatsoever was to take place, should be commenced. The idea of becoming friends was scarcely possible: the idea of parting without a mortal struggle as enemies, seemed equally impossible. Both the man appeared to comprehend this; and thus for nearly a minute did they stand

The reader is aware that Chiffin was of great strength: Tony Wilkins was many years younger, but was also endowed with considerable muscular power. The Cannibal possessed a degree of brute courage which was equal to any emergency: Tony Wilkins, though less daring and venturesome on ordinary occasions, had a spirit which if goaded to desperation, would flame up, investing him with a more than natural energy. Therefore if these two men engaged in a mortal struggle, it would be a terrible one.

As they looked at each other, they were both surprised on a certain account, and for the same reason. Chiffin was surprised to observe that Tony Wilkins was apparelled in the meanest manner, notwithstanding the immense sum he had robbed him of at the boozing-ken in Bethnal Green. On the other hand, Tony Wilkins was surprised that Chiffin, with a reward set upon his head, should go about in his wonted costume, which was rather of a conspicuous character.

"So we meet," said the Cannibal, in a hoarse voice, indicative of a concentrated rage: and his eyes literally glared upon Tony Wilkins.

"Well, it seems like it," answered the latter, "And what then?"

"Why, we are not likely to part again in a hurry, I think," responded Chiffin, "without a mischief being done to one or t'other of us."

"If you choose to begin, you'll find me ready," rejoined Wilkins, with a determined air. "But in course, if we make a row in the street, we shall both on us get took up; and then"—lifting his neck-tie in significant allusion to a halter—"we shall have *this* for the affair in Agar Town."

"I know it," answered the Cannibal: "but whatever happens, you and me must settle old scores. I tell you what: let us go to the *Cadgers*—and whatever's done, shall be done there."

"With all my heart," responded Wilkins. "You keep this side of the street—I'll go t'other—"

"Not a bit of it! We'll go arm in arm," interrupted Chiffin, with a diabolical expression—half leer, half grin: "We shall then be certain sure that one or t'other of us can't run away."

"Wery well," said Tony Wilkins; "let it be so."

Thus linked themselves arm-in arm—this pair of ruffians who were mortal enemies—this couple of murderers who

were bitter foes; and in that manner, without speaking another word, they proceeded along the narrow street till they reached the boozing-ken. All the inmates of the house were at rest, but inasmuch as the patrons and customers of the place were wont to call at all hours, the pot-boy slept just inside the front door, so as to be ready to answer any summons; and a bell was hung immediately over the spot where at night-time he was thus accustomed to make his bed.

The bell was pulled—the door was speedily opened—Chiffin and Tony Wilkins passed in; and the pot-boy closed the door again. It was pitch dark inside the boozing-ken: Chiffin stood on his guard with his pistol and his club—Tony Wilkins with a clasp knife which he took from his pocket; and though neither could see the defensive precautions thus adopted by the other, yet they both mutually knew that such precautions were taken.

"Get us a light," said Chiffin: and the moment the lucifer, which the pot-boy struck, blazed up, the Cannibal on the one side lowered his club and dropped the pistol into his pocket—while Tony Wilkins on the other hand as quickly closed his clasp knife and secured it about his person.

Then the two miscreants exchanged a fierce, malignant, cunning look,—as much as to imply that the one knew what the other had been doing, and that they were mutually on their guard against any sudden and treacherous attack. When the pot-boy had lighted a candle, Chiffin took it from him: and ordering some liquor, passed into the tap-room, followed by Wilkins. The pot-boy asked whether they did not mean to go to bed?—to which query the Cannibal replied that they intended to have a little conversation first. The pot-boy supplied them with the liquor ordered; and then crept back again into his own bed near the street door—where he soon fell asleep. He was too much accustomed to the presence of the queerest and vilest characters in that boozing-ken, to have any curiosity to listen to the conversation which might take place between them.

Chiffin and Tony Wilkins seated themselves on opposite sides of the table on which the candle and liquor stood; and each helped himself with a sort of gloomy coolness to the brandy thus supplied. They drank without

the slightest exchange of any of those compliments which under other circumstances would have passed;—and when they set down their glasses again, they eyed each other with a sort of sullen, dogged, menacing defiance.

They both felt that the moment was come when something must be said or done, in order to settle the past or establish the terms on which they were to be for the future.

"Now, don't you think that you was a very pretty feller," asked Chiffin, "to walk off with all the blunt I had been saving up to keep in my old age?"

"Old age indeed!" ejaculated Tony Wilkins, with a sneering laugh: "you talk as if there wasn't no such a thing as a gibbet, and no such a chap as Jack Ketch."

"Well," responded the Cannibal, "he has got two halters—and when he has strung up one feller he won't be too tired to do the work for another. But you hav'n't answered my question."

"I will answer it with another," replied Tony. "Don't you think you are an exceeding pretty feller—a reglar out-an'-out proper kind of a chap—to stick to all the swag got by doing the business of Sol Patch and his wife?"

"It's a lie!" interrupted Chiffin fiercely. "If you have seen a newspaper since, you must have read that after you and me parted I was chased by a lot of chaps, and had to jump into the canal to swim away and save my life. Didn't I meet you at the boozing-ken? and didn't you bolt away like a shot?"

"Well, I thought you was arter playing me a trick," replied Tony; "and so, as I had helped myself to your blunt, in course I stuck to it."

"And much good it seems to have done you," retorted the Cannibal.

"Well, it didn't do me no good—and that's the fact!" answered Wilkins. "I got blazing drunk—fell amongst a set of ragamuffins—and was robbed of every mag."

"That's a lie!" again ejaculated Chiffin. "You've got it about you; and I'll have it—or I'll cut your heart out."

"Two can play at cutting," said Tony: "but it's no lie, Chiffin, I can tell you. I shouldn't be togged as I am if it wasn't true; and I shouldn't have been such a fool either, to come wandering into London again to see what's to be

done, arter having tramped about in the country for these weeks past—starving and sleeping under hedges of haystacks——"

"If I thought you was telling me the truth," observed Chiffin, looking very hard in Tony's face, "I think I should perhaps be inclined to forgive you. But I don't believe a syllable of it."

"I tell you what it is, Chiffin,—you may believe it or not, just as you like: and as for your forgiveness, I don't care a rap for it. You led me into that precious business in Agar Town; and I have never knowed what it was to be easy in my mind since. If I go to sleep, it's to dream of gibbets, and hangmen, and sheriffs, and chaplains, and white night-caps, and immense crowds gathered round; and all the while a deep bell seems to be tolling in my ears. That's always when I'm asleep; and when I'm awake and wandering about, I always afraid of being suddenly grabbed by anybody I meet. I can't look no one in the face without thinking that he surveys me just as if he was going to say, 'You are Tony Wilkins the murderer.' So you see, Chiffin, there's no thanks to you for leading me into that there business."

"Why, what a puling, sneaking, white-livered, chicken-hearted chap you are!" growled the Cannibal, with a look of contempt. "I couldn't have believed it!—a feller that was always ready for any kind of business——"

"Aye!—but there's a precious deal of difference" interrupted Tony Wilkins bitterly, "betwixt mere priggging and t'other kind of job. I was born and bred to priggging, as one may say: so it come quite nat'ral, and there was no feeling *here* about it!"—and he laid his hand upon his breast as he thus spoke. "But t'other thing was done all in a minute: it was a sort of plunge from a puddle into the great deep sea. In course you can't understand all that I'm saying—'cause why, you're hardened to it. A chap that when he was a mere lad, could kill a feller and eat him, must be up to anything."

"Well, and so I am," responded Chiffin, with another grim smile, as if he took Tony's words as a most flattering compliment and gloried in it. "Why, there was a time when you was as proud as a peacock to be noticed by Mr. Chiffin Esquire; and you would have given one of your eyes to have earned the name of Cannibal."

"Yes—and a precious fool I was for letting you lead me away like that," answered Tony Wilkins, with a remorseful bitterness that was most unfeigned. "I only wish I had a chance of altering, and doing myself some good in the world. My thoughts and feelings has drove me to have this wish: but in course I know it can't be done. Besides, it would be useless. I should always see them folks with their throats cut and their brains beat out, rising before me. So you see, it matters little what becomes of me; and if you mean mischief—why, I'm your man, and we'll fight it out in any way you like. Only don't let us make more row than is necessary: let's start off and get into the open fields, if you like, and settle the business there: 'cause why, I don't want to get took up and sent to the Stone Jug."

"Well, Tony, you deserve anything I could do to you but," answered Chiffin: "but I really don't see any use in our being bad friends."

"Can we be good 'uns?" asked Wilkins, eyeing the Cannibal suspiciously.

"Why not? Just new I said something about forgiving you: but you wouldn't have that word at no price—and so there's an end of it. Suppose we say we'll let bygones be bygones, have a new start, and work together for the future? Now, Tony," asked Chiffin, "what do you say to that?"

"I say that I'm in such a precious plight, I must do anything to get a crust. Now, do you think, Chiffin, that if I had had twopence or threepence in my pocket to pay for a bed, you would have found me wandering about the streets at this hour? I haven't eaten nothin' since the middle of the day yesterday; and so this drink is getting into my head."

"Well, Tony, shall we be friends?" said the Cannibal.

"With all my heart," was the quick response: and here's my hand."

The two ruffians accordingly shook hands,—surveying each other with scrutinizing earnestness at the same time, to assure themselves that no treachery lurked beneath this display of reconciliation. It would seem that they were mutually satisfied with the way in which they met each other's looks; and raising their glasses, each nodded in the accustomed style of familiarity.

"Now, my boy," said Chiffin, "you shall have some grub: and I myself am as hungry as a hunter—for I have been out on business all night, and had

precious little sleep last night either. It's getting on for four," he added, glancing up at the immense clock in the tap-room; "and I sha'n't go to bed yet awhile. I must eat first. I know where the food is kept; and if you'll lend me the light, I'll go and help ourselves."

Thus speaking, Chiffin took the candle—and left the room. In a few minutes he returned, laden with a dish containing cold meat, a loaf of bread, and half a Dutch cheese. These comestibles he spread upon the table, and bade Tony Wilkins commence an attack thereon. This the younger ruffian was by no means backward in doing; and for the next half-hour there was very little said, both being too busy in satisfying their appetite to indulge in discourse.

"Well now," said Tony Wilkins when his ravenous hunger was appeased, "what's to be done?—for if you and me is to work together, the sooner we do summut, the better—'cause why, as I said just now, I'm altogether aground."

"You have been unfortunate, then?" observed the Cannibal.

"I can't exactly say how I have managed to live at all," rejoined Wilkins. "It wasn't living—it was downright starving. I never had such a time of it! I raly used to think it was a judgment for that there business —"

"Don't talk no more of it," interrupted the Cannibal: "it makes you quite chicken-hearted. Look here, Tony," he continued, pulling a sovereign out of his pocket and shoving it across the table: "when I say I'm friends with a chap, I mean it; and you sha'n't want a little blunt as long as I've got it to give you."

"Well, you're a good feller arter all," exclaimed Tony, as he took up the money. "I begin to feel summut like myself again."

"Aye—and you *shall* be like yourself again too, very soon," said Chiffin: "for I've got a good thing in hand for to-night; and we'll talk it over presently. Then I'll let you know what my plans are; and we shan't be in London many hours."

"I like you again, Chiffin, as much as ever," said Wilkins, on whom the brandy had taken more or less effect.

"Well, I'm getting rather sleepy," said the Cannibal: "and yet I don't know that it's worth while going to bed. Half-past four," he added, with

another glance at the clock. "Suppose we lie down on these benches and take a nap for an hour or two: then we shall wake up refreshed—we'll have some precious strong coffee, and talk over different matters."

"With all my heart," answered Wilkins, and he proceeded to lay himself down on one of the seats.

The Cannibal did the same, and in a few minutes appeared to doze off. Then he sent forth a low snoring noise: but the man slept not in reality: and every now and then he slightly opened one of his eyes and looked in the direction where Tony Wilkins lay. He could not however discern whether the latter was asleep, or whether *he* also was pretending to be so, but was keeping on the watch for fear that the reconciliation might not be genuine. The Cannibal accordingly retained his recumbent posture: but not one wink of actual slumber did he take;—and thus the time passed on until the people of the house began to move about soon after seven o'clock. The pot-boy entered to sweep out the tap-room; and the Cannibal raised himself slowly up with an air of extreme drowsiness. Tony Wilkins, who had really been sleeping, was awakened by the entrance of the pot-boy; and Chiffin was keen enough to perceive that he had actually slumbered.

"He thinks it's all right," said the Cannibal to himself: then speaking aloud, he exclaimed. "Well, Tony, do you feel better for that snooze? Mine has done me a world of good; and I'm as fresh as a lark. Let's go and have a bit of a wash in the yard; and meanwhile they shall get us some breakfast."

Tony Wilkins followed the Cannibal into the little yard at the back of the boozing-ken, and where there was a well, the mouth of which was unprotected by the usual wooden lid, which had recently been broken; and the landlord had neglected to have it repaired.

"Wait till I get a basin and a bit of soap," said the Cannibal, retracing his way into the house for the purpose.

In a few moments he re-appeared, with the objects which he had been to fetch; and he placed them in a window-ledge, telling Wilkins that he might have the first use of them. The unsuspecting Tony was advancing towards the window-ledge,—when, just as he neared the mouth of the well, Chiffin sprang upon him with the force and fury

of a tiger, at the same time giving vent to a subdued growl of diabolical savageness. Wilkins—instantaneously nerved with a preterhuman strength, which was inspired by the horrific danger to which he was thus all in a moment exposed—saved himself from being plunged headlong into the well, and made the Cannibal reel a few paces back. But Chiffin relaxed not his hold: he also felt himself armed with the power of a thousand: the struggle lasted but for a few brief moments—and the infuriated monster, hurling his miserable victim backward with a terrific impulse, sent him toppling over the brink of the yawning hole.

Whether it were that Tony's head struck against the windlass and thus instantaneously stunned him—or whether it were that he was stupefied with awful horror—we know not: certain however it is that no cry escaped his lips. Down he fell—there was a heavy splash—and as Chiffin with gloating looks bent over the opening, he saw that all was still.

CHAPTER CXL.

RAMON DE COLLANTES

WE must now go back for three weeks, in order to relate the first incidents of an episode which will however eventually be found to fit into this portion of our narrative,—inasmuch as its closing circumstances will bring us down to the date already reached: namely, the first week in November. It was therefore in the middle of October, that about a dozen well-armed men, and about half that number of very beautiful women, were grouped upon the bank of one of the streams flowing through the wild valleys of Catalonia. The males wore the half-military, half mountaineer dress which was peculiar to that district and to their own special avocations: the females were clad in the elegant costume also characteristic of those regions, and which has been before alluded to in the history of Elizabeth Paton.

Spanish feminine beauty for the most part exists more in novels and romances than in reality: at the same time beauty is to be found in Spain as well as elsewhere;—but in no part of that immense country, may female charms be so frequently encountered

as in the principality of Catalonia. The women belonging to the band of which we have above spoken, were assuredly the choicest specimens of this feminine loveliness. The picturesque apparel set off to admirable advantage the luxuriant contours of their forms: the fresh air and their own lightness of heart gave the carnation glow of animation to their countenances; their eyes sparkled brightly—and the smiles of their rosy lips displayed, in each individual instance, teeth of the most perfect ivory-whiteness. The men were as fine a set of fellows as ever wore broad swords at their sides or shouldered muskets: their sun-burnt complexions displayed the rich hues of vigorous health; their long dark hair clustered in natural curls about their heads: their glossy moustaches and beards added to the martial manliness of their looks.

It was in the forenoon of a bright and superb day, in the middle of October, as already stated—when these individuals, male and female, were thus grouped on the bank of the stream. Three or four tents were pitched close by; and in the shade of an overhanging crag, a cauldron was seething, in true gipsy-fashion, above a fire fed with logs, of resinous firs. An elderly woman—serving as cook to the band—was watching the culinary process: while the men, stretched in lounging positions, smoked their pipes and chatted with their mistresses, two or three of whom were diligently plying the needle. It was altogether a picturesque spectacle,—that group of Catalans amidst the wildly beautiful scenery of their own native hills!

If their conversation were listened to, it would have been found to run as follows:—

“I would give much to know what occupies your thoughts, Ramon,” said one of the young females, gaily and merrily addressing herself to the chief of the band,—who amongst those fine men, was decidedly the finest—the handsomest in features and the tallest in stature; while his age did not exceed six-and-twenty.

“You shall know my thoughts, pretty one,” responded Ramon. “I was envying Gonzalez the possession of such a sweet mistress as yourself—and wondering how soon accident or fortune would furnish me with another to supply the place of her who fled three months back.”

“Surely the redoubtable Ramon de Collantes cannot long be at a loss for a lovely one as his partner?” answered the same female who had before spoken. “He has but to make an incursion into some hamlet and carry off her who pleases his fancy best.”

“Yes this might be done,” rejoined Ramon: “and *has* been done before,” he added, with a smile. “But what has been the result? We have made enemies of those villagers whom it is our interest to keep as friends. No—it is not by such means that I must look to find a suitable partner of my fortunes.”

“Then what project have you in your head?” inquired Gonzalez, now joining in the discourse which his mistress had commenced: “for it is evident that you are revolving something in your thoughts.”

“Right!” exclaimed Ramon de Collantes. “I have determined that the first lovely damsel whom we may intercept travelling by coach or chaise shall become mine no matter how high her degree, nor what amount may be offered for her deliverance. Now, friends, will you make this concession to your chief?—will you pledge yourselves to forego the prospect of sharing a large sum for the ransom of such female, so that my desire may be fulfilled?”

“Agreed!” was the general cry on the part of all the male members of the band: while the females expressed their approbation with their arch looks and their smiling lips.

Scarcely was this singular convention thus settled, when Ramon de Collantes, suddenly starting up, pointed to an eminence on the summit of which stood a knot of trees, and whence a survey might be taken of all the circumjacent district of several miles. From a bough of one of those trees a small flag was seen to wave; and as the chief of the band pointed towards it, his comrades at once appeared to understand its meaning. Snatching up their weapons, which lay scattered on the ground, they were in readiness to obey whatsoever orders might be given: but all eyes were kept fixed on the knot of trees on the summit of the eminence. The little flag disappeared; and from the midst of the trees an individual came forth,—hastening down the somewhat precipitate slope, so as to join his comrades. He was apparelled and armed in the same style

on the look-out from the spot where he had hitherto remained concealed.

"What tidings?" demanded Ramon, when the watcher was near enough to be thus questioned.

"A post-chaise approaching along the road;" was the quick response.

"From which direction comes it?"

"From the north," was the answer. "It is doubtless bound to Barcelona."

"Then march, comrades!" exclaimed Ramon: and placing himself at their head, he led them quickly away from the spot.

Those to whom the females belonged, saved their hands in token of temporary farewell; and the fair ones themselves wished them success in their present enterprise. In a few minutes the band was beyond the view of the females; and turning into a narrow gorge, from which the side of the eminence rose abruptly, they pursued their way for about ten minutes, until they reached a grove at the farther extremity of the chasm, and which concealed as well as separated it from the main road. The grove was thickly threaded; and at the very instant that the banditti—for such they were—reached the road, the post-chaise, drawn by mules, was lumbering slowly past. The drivers offered not any resistance; and as the sole occupant of the vehicle was a female, there was no need of use violence—much less was there any reason for a conflict. Ramon de Collantes,—who had been chosen chief of the band as much on account of his proficiency in various languages, as for his valour and martial experience,—at once addressed the affrighted lady in the French tongue: for he saw that she was a Spanish woman;—and he bade her have no fears for her life. Then he threw a rapidly significant glance around upon his comrades, as much as to imply that accident had just sent him the object of those very wishes which he had recently been expressing. The lady,—who was indeed remarkably handsome, though evidently somewhat careworn and now paler still with terror,—did not reply in the French tongue: but in a few broken sentences uttered in English, to which he proceeded on her journey, as her object was of life and death importance. "Ah! madam, you are English, I receive," said Ramon de Collantes, now speaking in the traveller's own native

intended to confer upon me some special evidence of her favour, she could not have chosen a better mode: for I love and adore you beautiful English ladies!"

The fair traveller appeared much alarmed at the libertine flippancy of the chieftain's words—accompanied, as they were, by looks of gloating desire wandering over her face and form, as she sat in the chaise. She evidently apprehended the very worst at his hands: but being a woman of naturally strong mind, she subdued her terrors as well as she was able, and addressed him in these terms:—

"I have gold in my purse—and you perceive that I have some little jewellery about my person. Take all these! My trunk contains but some necessary changes of apparel: take them also if you will—but I beseech you to suffer me to proceed on my route! Oh, señor!" she added, a flood of tears suddenly gushing forth from her fine eyes: "you know not how important it is to me to reach Barcelona with the least possible delay!"

"No doubt of it, madam," answered Ramon: "every traveller, whether male or female, tells us precisely the same story. In the present instance it is not your gold nor your jewellery which we will lay hands upon: as for your trunk, one of my men shall take charge of it for you:—but it is absolutely necessary that you should alight and accompany us elsewhere."

Again did an expression of acute alarm appear upon the lady's countenance; and joining her hands in all earnest manner, she said in a voice of corresponding entreaty, "Once more do I beseech you that I may be suffered to proceed! There is a person, dearer to me than life, in sore trouble—on whose behalf I have undertaken this long, long journey——"

"Madam," interrupted Ramon de Collantes, "it is somewhat inconvenient for us to stand bandying words upon the public highway: I therefore request that you lose no time in accompanying us whither we shall lead."

"Good heavens, what a frightful calamity!" she exclaimed, all the remnants of her fortitude appearing to abandon her, and her countenance becoming expressive of a mingling anguish and despair.

you," rejoined Raymond: but it cannot be otherwise. You must come!"

"No—you may kill me first!" ejaculated the fair traveller: "you must drag me hence by force——"

"Which I shall assuredly do," responded the bandit-chief, in a decisive tone, "Come, madam! You would do well to alight of your own free will: it is simply absurd for you to offer resistance against a dozen strong men."

"One word more!" cried the afflicted stranger, now sinking upon her knees inside the vehicle, at the open door of which Ramon stood thus parleying with her. "Have you any being on earth who is dear to you? If so, by the name of such loved being, I adjure you to have mercy upon me! Again I declare that there is one whom I love more dearly than life, now the inmate of a gaol—perhaps doomed to die—and if I hasten not to console him——"

"Madam, it goes to my heart," interrupted Ramon, "to be compelled to reject your prayer: but it cannot be avoided. I am resolute—I am determined—you must come with us."

"Then may God help me!" said the unhappy stranger, covering her face with her hands and bursting into another torrent of tears.

One of the men, on a signal from Ramon de Collantes, shouldered the trunk,—while he himself, throwing his arms round the fair traveller's waist, was about to drag her forth from the chaise,—when suddenly regaining her presence of mind, she said with mingled dignity and indignation, "Touch me not, senor! If I must accompany you, I will at least escape as much outrage as by my own conduct I may be enabled to avoid."

With these words she descended from the vehicle: but the moment her feet touched the road, she again bent a look full of the most earnest supplication upon the bandit-chief,—saying, "I had heard much of the chivalrous magnanimity of Spaniards—Oh! let not my faith therein be destroyed now!"

Even in the depth of her affliction, she appeared so exceedingly handsome—with her dark blue eyes, her vermilion lips, her beautiful teeth, and the luxuriant ringlets of dark brown which clustered on either side of her countenance—that Ramon de Collantes was ravished with her charms. Then too her form was so fine,—her stature so tall, her

shape so richly and yet so symmetrically modelled,—that the bandit-chief though he could not obtain for himself a more fitting mistress; and though not entirely without generous sentiments, he could not possibly bring himself to renounce the splendid creature whom accident had thus thrown in his way.

"Madam," he said, again assuming a resolute look, "you must accompany us!"

For an instant the afflicted fair one glanced rapidly around, as if in the last wild hope of observing some succour near: but that was scarcely to be expected in the mountainous regions of Catalonia. She would have appealed to the muleteers for aid—only that she now beheld them in friendly discourse with three or four of the banditti, and accepting drams from the flasks of these lawless individuals. All hope died within her: and in order to avoid outrage, she motioned that she was ready to accompany the inexorable chief.

He led the way through the grove, back into the gorge,—his men following at a little distance, and one of them bearing the trunk. As the party walked along, the fair traveller again used all her eloquence to move Collantes to mercy: but he still proved resolute in his purpose. Now that he had still more leisure than even at first to contemplate her, he saw that she must be about four or five-and-twenty; and though not perhaps a lady in the strict meaning of the term, yet of genteel appearance, good manners, and graceful bearing. She was well-dressed; and altogether of an appearance full well calculated to make an impression upon the heart of Ramon de Collantes. Her voice was of flutelike harmony—rich-toned without being masculine; and when modulated to the accents of passionate entreaty, it had something that ravished rather than moved the soul of the bandit.

"No, fair lady," he said; "it is impossible I can accede to your prayer. With me and my band must you remain: but you may be assured of worthy treatment. May I ask whether it be a lover, a husband, or a brother, whom you were on your way to see at Barcelona?"

This allusion to the object of the fair traveller's journey, threw her into fresh [paroxysm] of grief.—so that she

renew herself down on the slope of the gorge; and again covering her face with her hands, gave way to an outburst of woe so deep, so anguished, that well nigh moved the heart of Ramon to compassion. But as his eyes slowly wandered over the fine symmetry of her form, he again felt how impossible it was to surrender the prize thus thrown in his way;—and moreover, if he himself were induced to do so, he knew that he could only incur the ridicule of his comrades. Having some tolerable amount of experience in respect to the female art, he thought it better to permit this gush of affliction to expend itself; he addressed her again;—and thus, some minutes, there was a halt at that spot. None of his companions could utter a syllable of English: they therefore understood not what had been passing between himself and her; but they of course judged that she entreated him to grant her freedom;—and that he refused. By their looks they encouraged him to persevere: while they likewise congratulated him, in a similarly significant manner, on the prize which he had gained.

"For what am I destined? what is to be my doom?" she suddenly demanded, she sprang up to her feet, her cheeks glowing with indignation which her past thoughts had evidently inspired. "If I think to bend me to your vile purpose, you will be disappointed! I will die free! Yes—there is one whom I love, who is in a dungeon—Perhaps his life will be forfeited to the laws of your country—and ye are not men—ye are monsters in human shape, if ye hold me back from the accomplishment of my sacred object! Oh! once again do I adjure you, senor—suffer me to depart! I have all I possess—tell me what farther sum you require, and it shall be paid—honourably and duly paid—I swear it shall!—even though my parents gather themselves to raise the sum which I may demand!"

Whether in the moments of her indignation, or in those of her pathetic entreaty, she appeared so handsome in the eyes of Ramon de Collantes, that he was more than ever determined to keep possession of her. She read this decision in his looks; and suddenly becoming quite calm,—yet it was the calmness of desperation,—she said in a low deep voice, "Tell me, senor, for what am I destined?" "To be my bride," responded the bandit-chief.

"Your bride?" she ejaculated. "And where is the priest who will join our hands?"—these last words being spoken with a sort of bitter irony which arose from desperation itself.

"By the Holy Virgin, lady," exclaimed Collantes, "it is a comical question that you put! Soothly speaking, however, I must confess that there is no chaplain attached to my band; and therefore we must be content with the marriage festival, without the religious rites. But in me will you have a brave, a fond, and an indulgent partner. We live a happy life: the whole range of the wild Catalan mountains and their picturesque valleys is our own: we pay neither tax nor tribute: the purses of travellers furnish our revenues. Sometimes we dwell in tents in truly patriarchal style: at others we seek our baronial tower. We dance—we sing—we eat and drink of the best: we have no cares. Such is the life which you have now to embrace:—and in truth it is not a destiny which need wring tears from those bright eyes of yours."

"I have listened with attention," responded the fair traveller,—pale with that same desperate calmness which she still maintained,—"because I would know every detail and minute particular of the doom which you purpose to be mine. But it shall not be! You see before you a woman who, if she have hitherto displayed in your presence the weakness of her sex, will afford you proof of its strength. Heartless robber, I will not be your bride!—soul-less and implacable brigand, you shall not triumph over me! It shall be a struggle until the very death between you and me, if you dare attempt coercion or outrage! Around us there are precipices, a leap from any one of which is certain death: or in these wilds there are waters, flowing rapid and deep—and they shall engulf me sooner than I will abandon myself to your arms! Now, as you have given me your decision, I offer you mine; and if you seek to make me the victim of your persecution, it will not be a triumph which you accomplish—but a murder which you penetrate!"

"Beautiful lady," exclaimed the bandit chief, scorn wreathing his mustached lip, "in every respect are you fitted to become my bride. It is a woman of spirit, such as you, that I have sought; and again I repeat that Dame Fortune has favoured me this day. Have the kindness to accompany us yet a little farther; and you will find charming

females to welcome you amongst them."

The fair stranger said not another word—but moved forward, the bandit-captain walking by her side. No doubt she was resolute in her purpose of seeking death, should the moment come when she must either adopt that alternative or else retain life at the price of her honour:—and perhaps she was not yet without the hope of either bending the hitherto inflexible brigand to compassion, or else of discovering amidst the chapter of accidents some opportunity of escape. As he watched her countenance, he saw that he indeed had to do with a female of strong mind.

In a few moments the encampment was reached; and the Catalan women, gathering around the new comer, endeavoured to make her comprehend by signs—when they found she understood not their language—how welcome she was. Then too, their dark eyes flung congratulatory looks upon Ramon de Collantes, who had thus succeeded in obtaining the gratification of those wishes he had this very forenoon been expressing. As for the fair stranger herself, she received the women's attentions with a sort of distant courtesy,—as if she did not choose to offend them outright, nor yet to show the least evidence of being reconciled to her fate. In this latter respect it was useless to dissimulate,—inasmuch as by no sudden change in her manner towards Ramon de Collantes, could she possibly hope to deceive him in so short a time with regard to her feelings, or throw him off his guard.

The contents of the cauldron were emptied into vessels ready for their reception: other articles of food, accompanied by bottles and jars of wines and strong liquors, were produced; and the banquet was spread upon the grass. Meanwhile the captive stranger had sat down on the trunk of a felled tree; and as she contemplated the tents, the females, the arrangements for the repast, and the aspect of the brigands themselves, she began to associate all these appearances with some circumstances which the present adventure itself had brought back to her memory.

"Are there many such bands as your's in the mountains of Catalonia?" she asked, addressing herself to Ramon de Collantes.

"There are several such bands," he responded, evidently well pleased that

she should thus of her own accord have renewed the conversation.

The lady remained absorbed in thought for a few moments, and then said, "I presume, by the air of authority which you wear, that you are the acknowledged chief?"

"I think, lady," he responded, "that I have already given you to understand such to be the case."

"How long have you been with this band? how long have you acted as its chief?"

"I have been with the band for some eight years," was the rejoinder. "You may therefore judge, lady, that I was only a stripling when I joined it. As for the captaincy, I have held the post about five years."

"And are the captains of the various bands generally known to each other?" was the fair traveller's next question.

"For the most part," replied Ramon, surprised at these queries: for he more than suspected that they were not put through mere idle curiosity, but that the stranger had some ulterior object in view.

"It must occasionally happen," she continued, "that there are names amongst you which acquire the potency of spells from being associated with daring deeds and generous actions. What if I were enabled to mention some such name as this?—what if I were to tell you have that I have a slight acquaintance with one who a few years back commanded a band in these mountains—it might even have been your own—and that were he here now, I feel convinced he would use his influence on my behalf! If such a name pass my lips, I say, would it induce you to have compassion upon me?"

While the fair stranger was thus speaking, Ramon de Collantes contemplated her with an increasing degree of blended interest and curiosity. It naturally surprised him that an English female whom accident had thus placed in his power, should allude to an acquaintance with any former bandit-chief such as he himself now was: and he knew not at the instant how to reply. While he was still hesitating, one of his comrades suddenly gave vent to an ejaculation; and starting to his feet, grasped his musket. All eyes were at that instant turned in the same direction towards which the brigand was looking: and they beheld a person, evidently

dressed as a gentleman, approaching from near the entrance of the gorge. Perceiving that he was unattended, and that no followers made their appearance, the firearms which in the first moment had been caught up, were deposited on the ground again,—all save that of Ramon himself, who retained his musket as he advanced a few paces to meet this new comer, at the same time significantly nodding to his men to keep a sharp look-out upon the fair captive and anticipate any attempt which she might make with respect to an escape.

But strange indeed was the expression which rapidly lighted up her handsome countenance with blending joy and amazement, as that new-comer drew near. Anxious uncertainty speedily changed into positive conviction: for she saw that she was not wrong—that the individual who was advancing, was indeed he whom she had conjectured at the first glimpse of his form and features:—and springing from her seat, she cried in a tone of thrilling exultation, “Count Christoval!”

“Christoval!” echoed every voice, as every one likewise started up again: and there was a general rush towards Don Diego—for he himself this new-comer proved to be.

But the instant his eyes settled upon the countenance of the fair captive, he stopped short with as much amazement as was depicted on her own features; and he exclaimed, “Good heavens, Miss Marshall! is it you?”

CHAPTER CXL.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

YES—it was indeed Don Diego de Christoval who thus made his appearance. This too was the very band he had once commanded;—though necessarily, during the interval of about five years since he resigned his post, there had been changes as to a few individuals, wrought by violent death on the one hand and by fresh membership on the other. But six or seven males and two or three of the females were still the same whom Don Diego had known and who knew him. To all the rest was his name familiar as a loved and an honoured one, and thus was it that the moment it was mentioned there was a general rush, prompted by enthusiastic feelings, towards him.

It was now the turn of Ramon de Collantes and all the members of the band, male and female, to be astonished at the recognition which took place between Don Diego Christoval and the captive lady, as the latter flew towards the former for protection. The Spanish nobleman shook her kindly by the hand: he could not forget that it was through her, on his arrival in England ten weeks back, he had obtained a clue to the discovery of Elizabeth Paton's residence; and moreover he instantaneously knew by the manner in which she bounded towards him, that she was the captive Englishwoman whom he had expected to find with the band. He was aware that his influence would suffice to effect her liberation: and he was well pleased at having the opportunity of rendering her a service.

We will pause for a moment to explain how it happened that the Count thus made his appearance upon the scene. As the reader is aware, he had left England soon after he was formally accepted as Elizabeth Paton's suitor—to settle some affairs in the Spanish capital, and procure such documents as would convince the Marquis of Eagledean he was the wealthy individual he represented himself to be. Being desirous to get back again with the least possible delay to England, so as to enjoy the society of his well-beloved Elizabeth,—he brought his business at Madrid to a speedy termination, and set off in his travelling carriage on his return. Scarcely had the banditti quitted the spot from which they bore off Kate Marshall, when the equipage of Count Christoval dashed up. From the muleteers he learnt an account of what had taken place; and though they were unable to tell him the name of the Englishwoman whose abduction had thus been forcibly effected, they nevertheless made him aware that she was in a state of the most cruel tribulation. The muleteers were well acquainted with the band led by Ramon de Collantes; and from the information they gave, Don Diego thus discovered that it was the very same which he himself had once commanded. Anxious to perform an act of generosity, he ordered his equipage to await his return: and judging from his topographical knowledge, that the band would be encamped at the extremity of the gorge, he proceeded in that direction.—making his appearance

under the circumstances already described.

When the first greetings had taken place between himself and the lawless tribe, he made a rapid sign for Kate Marshall to retire to a little distance, while he spoke aside to the bandit-captain. Ramon de Collantes revered his late chief with truly enthusiastic devotion; and it therefore required but little suasion on Don Diego's part to induce him to consent to restore Kate Marshall to freedom. The reader can be at no loss to comprehend that it was the name of Don Diego Christoval which Kate was about to pronounce, in the hope that it would have a certain effect in her favour upon Collantes,—at the very instant when the nobleman himself so timeously made his appearance.

The conference between Christoval and Collantes lasted but a few minutes; and when it was over, the former drew forth a pocket book containing a number of bank-notes,—a large portion of which he insisted that Ramon should accept as the ransom money for Kate Marshall and to be shared amongst the band. Collantes at first positively refused to receive the bounty of his former chief; but Don Diego insisted; and when Ramon made known to his followers the amount thereof, they once more surrounded the liberal donor, pouring forth their heartfelt gratitude.

In a few hasty words Don Diego informed Kate Marshall that she was free—for which announcement she proffered the sincerest thanks and exhibited the liveliest joy. Christoval assured her that her post-chaise was still waiting in the road,—adding, “We must stay a few minutes to partake of refreshments with these people; or they will consider me churlish and unfriendly—and for the sake of old associations I am unwilling to earn their displeasure. Besides, you perceive, Miss Marshall, how advantageous it may be under certain circumstances to wield an influence over these wild Catalonian bands. Tarry you therefore until I take my departure; and I will escort you back to your vehicle.”

Kate could not of course refuse; and Ramon de Collantes, now accosting her, expressed a hope that she would not bear him any ill will on account of his conduct towards her. She was in too good a humour at having regained her freedom, to give an unfavourable response; and

she proffered him her hand as a proof that all was forgiven. The entire party then sat down to the banquet; and at the expiration of half-an-hour, Don Diego Christoval took his leave of his former friends, Miss Marshall accompanying him.

“And now, might I ask,” he said, as he conducted her through the gorge, “how it is that I find you a traveller in my native land? Perhaps I may be of some service to you: for I presume it must be more on business than on pleasure that you are journeying thus alone?”

“Ah! my lord,” responded Kate, a sudden gleam of hope lighting up her handsome features, which had become clouded (as Christoval questioned her relative to her object in visiting Spain, —“I am certain you could assist me! Your rank—your influence—your connexions, might be used for the best and kindest of purposes, and to save my happiness from becoming a total wreck!”

“Rest assured, Miss Marshall, responded Christoval, “that if I can thus forward your aims, I shall be truly delighted. But pray explain the peculiar circumstances to which you thus allude.”

“I must inform your lordship,” answered Kate, bending down her eyes, while a blush mantled upon her countenance,—“that I am engaged to be married to as gallant a sailor as ever dared the perils of the ocean. And a handsome man, too,—a generous and kind-hearted one,—is Edward Russell. He is the owner of a small trading-vessel, and commands it as its captain. By several voyages up the Mediterranean he has acquired some little property; and when he set out upon this present voyage, it was understood it was to be his last, provided success should still attend his ventures. It appears that poor Ned, anxious by a bold stroke to realize a considerable profit ere settling down in married life, freighted his vessel with a quantity of those English goods for which there is always a considerable contraband trade on the coast of Catalonia. It was in the middle of the night that he endeavoured to land his cargo about ten miles north of Barcelona: but it would appear that the revenue officers had obtained an intimation of the design—for Russell and his crew were attacked while landing on the Spanish coast. They made a desperate

defence—several of the Spanish officers were killed—but my unfortunate lover was overpowered by numbers and taken prisoner; while his men managed to reach the boat, push it off, and effect their escape to the vessel. The vessel itself got away after being chased by some Spanish cruizers; and poor Ned Russell was conducted a prisoner to Barcelona. There he lies in a dungeon! His trial will shortly come on. Alas! my lord, I dare not even allude to the probable result—or I should rather say the result that is *inevitable*, unless you will kindly interest yourself on our behalf. Yes—*our* behalf,” added Kate, weeping; “because I feel that the death of *him* would be the death of *me*. And, oh! such a death—it is madness to think of it!”

“And you have journeyed all the way from England to see your lover?” said Don Diego, gazing with admiration upon the heroic young woman.

“The moment he was plunged into the gaol at Barcelona,” responded Kate, “he wrote me a letter, breaking as delicately as he could the dreadful intelligence: for poor Ned feared that I should never see him more. And yet, though in that letter he asked me not to come to him, his heart must have told him that I should do so.—Yes, I should have come, were the distance even a thousand times as great! he knows, and expects me. I am sure he does!”

“Magnanimous young woman!” exclaimed the Count; “you shall have whatsoever little assistance I may be enabled to render you. But this, I fear,” he added gloomily, “will scarcely avail under the peculiar circumstances of the present case: for as you tell me, there has been a conflict—blood as shed—lives were lost.”

“But Ned Russell’s broadsword slew at one of those unfortunate men!” Miss Marshall hastened to observe. “His rapier was drawn only in self-defence: parried blows, but dealt none. His men took those lives that were lost——”

“This may be a consolation for *him* and for *you*, Miss Marshall,” observed the Count; “but in the eye of the law will scarcely be deemed a palliative of the offence, inasmuch as Captain Russell is the leader of those men who took these lives. However, the best that I can do shall be done.”

“And my eternal gratitude is your lordship’s due,” answered Kate, with vivid enthusiasm.

“Surely, Miss Marshall,” observed Don Diego, “you had some other hope of being enabled to interest yourself on behalf of your intended husband? If so, leave no stone unturned——”

“I had indeed some slight hope in a certain quarter,” responded Kate. “The Marquis of Villebelle, the French *Charge d’affaires*, at the Court of Madrid, is under some obligation to me on account of a certain matter wherein I was enabled a few months back to render him a little assistance——”

“The Marquis of Villebelle?” ejaculated Don Diego, to whose ear the name was well known, inasmuch as Elizabeth Paton had told him all her past history.

“Yes, my lord—it is he,” rejoined Kate, “on whom I did somewhat reckon for succour in his dreadful dilemma. I know wherefore the name has thus startled you——”

“By all means,” said the Count, “fail not to communicate with the Marquis—or see him—as soon as possible. Wherefore should you proceed first of all to Barcelona? wherefore not repair straight to Madrid?”

“I was bewildered; my lord—I knew not how to act,” answered Kate, weeping. “I thought that the best course would be to visit poor Russell first of all—to ascertain precisely how matters stood—for I am even in ignorance whether the trial has yet taken place or not——”

“Ah! if so——” interrupted Christoval; but he suddenly stopped short, fearing to shock the afflicted young woman; for what he was about to say was that the execution of the sentence would speedily follow its pronouncement.

“I know what your lordship means,” murmured Kate. “What would you advise me to do?—shall I proceed to Barcelona? or shall I pursue the road to Madrid?”

Don Diego Christoval reflected for a few minutes; and then he said, “I have made up my mind what course I will pursue in the matter, and the line of conduct I shall counsel you to adopt. I will myself repair to Barcelona——”

“You, my lord?” cried Kate, with enthusiastic gratitude. “Oh, this kindness!—it can never be repaid!”

“Cheerfully I interest myself on your behalf,” responded Christoval. “Yes—I will proceed to Barcelona: the newly appointed Captain-General of this principality is an acquaintance

of mine; and I think I may faithfully promise that everything shall be suspended until after the result of the Marquis of Villebelle's appeal in Captain Russell's favour, to the supreme authorities at Madrid. For the Marquis *must* make this appeal at your intercession——"

"Oh! he will, he will!" exclaimed Kate: "I know that he will! And now there is hope! there is hope!"—and her countenance became radiant with joy.

By this time the gorge was passed—the grove was threaded—and the road reached. The two equipages were waiting; and after a little more conversation, during which Count Christoval gave Kate instructions how to proceed when she reached Madrid, they were about to separate, when one of the brigands suddenly emerged from the wood with Miss Marshall's trunk upon his shoulder. This, in the loveliness of her joy at being rescued from Ramon's power, she had altogether forgotten: the banditti themselves had likewise forgotten it when she and Christoval had taken their leave: but scarcely had they departed from the spot, when Collantes remembered that the trunk was in his possession, and he lost no time in despatching one of his men in the direction of the road. It came in time; and Miss Marshall, having once more expressed her fervid gratitude to Don Diego Christoval for the kindness he was showing her, proceeded in the post-chaise in the direction of Madrid, while the Count took the road to Barcelona.

On arriving in this city, Don Diego at once made inquiries respecting Captain Russell; and was much shocked on learning that the trial had taken place on the previous day—that sentence of death had been pronounced—and that the culprit was to be executed, by the strangling process of the *garotte*, on the following morning: that is to say, the morning after the the Count's arrival in Barcelona. He lost not a moment in visiting the palace of the Captain General—not the same, be it well understood, who was governor of the principality at the time when Christoval was an outlaw amongst the mountains. The present Captain-General had only recently been appointed to his present post; and Don Diego had met him in society at Madrid. The General knew everything in favour of Don Diego, and nothing to his discredit; or if he were at all informed

on the latter point, he did not choose to remember it on the part of one who was now possessed of considerable wealth. He therefore received the Count with becoming courtesy: but he shook his head when the latter unfolded to him the nature of his business.

"It is impossible, my dear Count," answered the Captain General: "I dare not suspend the execution of the sentence. You are aware the smuggling on this coast has of late years reached a pitch perfectly intolerable; and even without collateral circumstances of a dark nature, it would be necessary to make an example. But in the present instance they *are* these circumstances; and they are of the blackest dye. Three lives were lost——"

"I am aware of it—too painfully aware of it," responded Christoval: "but your Excellency must bear in mind that the unfortunate prisoner only acted in self-defence, and could not restrain his own men."

"All this was alleged on his behalf at the trial yesterday," responded the Captain-General: but it could not be denied that he was the leader of the men by whom the slaughter was perpetrated: it was his own vessel whence the landing was effected, his own goods that were attempted to be run ashore. No, Count Christoval—it is impossible—I cannot suspend this sentence!"

"I know not how I can persevere in beseeching your Excellency to grant me the boon I solicit," resumed Don Diego: "but nevertheless, I am emboldened to be thus urgent, because I have before me the image of the young woman who said so emphatically that *his* death would be her death likewise."

"And you tell me Count," said the Captain-General, evidently deliberating within himself, "that this young woman feels confident of being enabled to enlist the interest of the French Embassy on behalf of the prisoner?"

"I have the positive certainty that she will thus far succeed," responded Christoval: therefore, again do I conjure your excellency to adopt a merciful view."

The Captain-General paced to and fro in the spacious apartment several minutes; and at length stopping short, he said, "Count Christoval, I grant your request. I will order the execution of the sentence to be suspended. Do you wish to see the prisoner? If

so you shall yourself convey to him the announcement that he is respited for the present—that is to say, until the result of an appeal which is being made on his behalf at Madrid, can be known in Barcelona.”

“I thank your Excellency for this additional proof of kindness,” answered Christoval; “and I will lose no time in visiting the prisoner.”

The Captain-General furnished Don Diego with the necessary authority to see Russell; and the Count proceeded at once to the gaol in which the prisoner was incarcerated. He was escorted by a turnkey to the massively-built dungeon where Kate's lover, heavily ironed, was seated in gloomy reflection. The unhappy man had heard his death-sentence pronounced: he saw not the slightest hope of escape from the dreadful doom thus decreed. But it was not that he feared to die on his own account: he knew that his limbs would not tremble, nor his nerves quiver, when ascending the ladder of the scaffold: it was on behalf of Kate—handsome and well-beloved Kate, once so gay and mirthful—that he was thus deeply desponding. He was, as she had described him, a fine handsome fellow—somewhat coarse featured, it is true, but with the frank, open, honest look of an English sailor, and with a form the manly symmetry of which was not even concealed by the loose apparel that he wore. He was accustomed, on board his vessel, to wear the simple habiliments of a British tar; and it was in that raiment he had been captured—this raiment that clothed him now:

Count Christoval was, as the reader is aware, a perfect stranger to Ned Russell: but they were not many minutes alone together, before the generous-hearted Spanish nobleman won the grateful esteem of the English mariner. And tears, too, trickled down Ned Russell's sunburnt countenance, on learning that his own Kate had travelled all the way from England, not merely to see him, but likewise to interest herself on his behalf.

CHAPTER CXLII.

THE LONELY INN.

THE reader cannot do otherwise than admire the courage of Kate Marshall, in having undertaken this journey from her

own native land to foreign climes on behalf of her lover. Though perfectly ignorant both of the French and Spanish tongues, she had nevertheless made her way through almost the entire length of France; and we now behold her pursuing her travel in Spain. She had set out with no companion to cheer her—with no friend to succour, guide, or defend her. Her father was laid up with a severe attack of the gout at the time she left Dover—otherwise he would have accompanied her: her mother was compelled to remain at home in superintendence of the establishment; and it would have been useless, as well as expensive, for Kate to bring any one of her sisters with her. Therefore was it that she travelled alone;—her only aids being a courageous spirit and a well-filled purse.

As may be supposed, her fortune at meeting with Don Diego Christoval had cheered her considerably,—not merely because he was the means of rescuing her from the power of the Catalan bandits, but likewise because he had so generously volunteered to interest himself to the utmost of his power in the cause of Ned Russell. Kate therefore pursued her journey with brighter hopes than she had previously entertained; and what with the good offices of Count Christoval at Barcelona, and the succour which she expected to receive from the Marquis of Villebelle at Madrid, the heroic young woman was very far from despairing of ultimate success in saving her lover's life. There was much in her character to admire, notwithstanding that, by the way in which she had been brought up, she was not over nice nor particular in certain respects. For instance, smuggling in her eyes was no moral offence; and we have seen her laugh approvingly at the dashing exploits of her former friend and school-companion Elizabeth Paton. But in that virtue which constitutes the chief ornament of the sex, Kate Marshall's character was unimpeachable: never had she strayed from the path of chastity—never had she given encouragement to any libertine look that was fixed upon her. Even before she was engaged to Ned Russell, her behaviour in this respect was most scrupulously proper; and the same may be said of her sisters. She moreover possessed a generous heart and kind disposition: the reader is already aware that she did not lack courage: and thus if her merits were

weighed against her faults, it would be impossible to refuse her some slight meed of admiration.

Having parted with Don Diego Christoval in the manner already described, Kate pursued her journey in the chaise. Hours passed—the evening came—and as the dusk closed in, she could not help observing that the road was much narrower than the highway had hitherto appeared to be; indeed, it had rather the appearance of a lane than of the main route. In a few minutes the chaise entered the precincts of a forest: the shade of the huge trees completely shut out the twilight. She was enveloped in darkness. The position was far from an agreeable one. Utterly unacquainted with the Spanish language—and the two muleteers being equally unable to answer her in her own native tongue—she could not question them as to whether they were pursuing the right road. At the several places where the cattle were changed since she parted from Don Christoval, the single word “Madrid,” pronounced by her lips, had served as an indication of the direction in which she was to be borne: but she was now seized with misgivings as to the good faith of the muleteers belonging to the last relay—all the terrific tales she had ever read of travellers being murdered in lonely places on the Continent, trooped into her memory—and notwithstanding her courageous disposition, she could not prevent the darkest suspicions from arising in her mind. She had no defensive weapon; and she regretted that she had not provided herself therewith: for though she might be certain to succumb beneath the murderous attack of the muleteers, if such were intended,—it would nevertheless be some satisfaction to possess the means of selling her life as dearly as possible.

While all these reflections were passing through her mind, she suddenly perceived through the chaise window a light glimmering at a little distance on the right hand; and in a few minutes the lumbering equipage stopped in front of what appeared to be a small inn or public-house. Kate’s spirits instantaneously rose again, as the thought struck her that her fears were groundless after all, and that this must be the place where fresh cattle were to be obtained: for she had resolved to tarry not on the route, but to journey straight on with the least possible delay towards the Spanish

capital. She did not therefore intend to alight,—but remained seated inside the vehicle, hoping that it would soon be in motion again. A man and a woman—both of about middle age, and by their appearance evidently the master and mistress of the little inn—came forth with a lantern. Some conversation took place between these persons and the muleteers; and then one of the latter, approaching the vehicle, opened the door and made signs for Miss Marshall to descend. The innkeeper and his wife saluted her with as much courtesy as it was in their nature to display, and also by signs testified their readiness to conduct her into the hostelry. Thinking that it was imagined she needed refreshments,—but having partaken of some at the previous halting-place,—she intimated by signs as well as she was able that she was in a hurry to proceed: whereupon the muleteers,—pointing to their own cattle, and then in the direction of the stable joining the inn—shook their heads, as much as to imply that there was no relay to be had. Kate understood what was meant, and felt sadly perplexed. Oh! if she could but converse with these people in their own language, so as to ascertain how long she was to make up her mind to be delayed: but she could not glean this information—and her only resource was to conjecture that the journey might be renewed at the expiration of an hour or two, when the mules had enjoyed rest and bait. She accordingly followed the innkeeper and his wife into the house, where she was shown to a room on the groundfloor; and without any sign or intimation from herself, a young servant-woman began to spread the table for supper.

Spain is notorious for the indifferent accommodation of its hotels, inns, and taverns, even in the largest and most populous cities: but the secluded and inferior kinds of hostelries are of the very worst and poorest description. The one where Miss Marshall now found herself, was decidedly no exception to the general rule. The room was only lighted by a single candle, and wore the most poverty-stricken appearance, without even the recommendation of cleanliness as a set-off against its sordid aspect and poor accommodation. A few ricketty chairs, a rude table, and a dilapidated sideboard, constituted the furniture: while

a few miserable prints, representing scriptural scenes, served as embellishments for the walls. There was no drapery to the window; and two of the panes being broken, were stopped up with rags stuffed through,—recourse not even being had to the expedient of pasting paper over the apertures.

Kate sat down, dispirited and uneasy. She liked not this halt in so lonely a place: she could not prevent her previous suspicions from reviving in her mind: for she felt almost convinced that the high road had been deviated from—and the longer she reflected on this circumstance, the more ominous did it appear. By the light of the lantern when she first descended from the vehicle, she had observed the countenances of the innkeeper and his wife; and they were not over prepossessing. She now studied the features of the attendant who was spreading the table. This was a girl of about eighteen—decidedly pretty—but with one of those countenances which are too inexpressive, too quiet and reserved to afford much indication of the individual's character. She was attired in a very homely manner, but yet with a certain degree of neatness: her figure was light and graceful; and the short petticoats revealed all the lower part of her symmetrical limbs. Indeed, the skirt of her dress did not descend below the middle of the swell of the leg,—thus completely displaying the well-turned ankles. She walked with steps of elastic firmness—carried her head and shoulders well—and, altogether, in personal appearance, was far from uninteresting. She said not a word,—probably having been already informed that the lady guest was a foreigner and spoke not the Spanish tongue: but every now and then she fixed her dark eyes with an apparent curiosity upon Miss Marshall.

The viands which the girl placed upon the table, were by no means calculated to provoke an appetite; and indeed Kate was in no humour to touch them at all, even if they had been more inviting. She however took something on her plate, so as not to give offence by altogether repudiating the fare; and when the supper was over, the mistress of the inn made her appearance. Her countenance was very much flushed—she had a strange vacant look—and for the first few moments, Kate could not comprehend what was the matter with her. She was not however long at a loss to discover the cause of the woman's

excitement: for the smell of her breath and her unsteady movements showed that she was considerably under the influence of liquor. Digusted beyond expression, Miss Marshall recoiled from the woman's approach: but the latter was too far inebriated to notice the sentiment of loathing which her presence thus inspired. Taking up the candle, she beckoned Kate to follow her: but as Miss Marshall hesitated—not exactly understanding what this new proceeding meant—the woman made signs to show that she purposed to conduct her to a bedchamber.

Kate was now more than ever a prey to unpleasant misgivings, when she found it was intended that she should pass the night at that lonely inn in the depth of a forest. She issued from the room; and repairing to the place which had already been pointed out to her as the stable, found the muleteers attending to their animals by the light of a lantern suspended to the roof. She pointed to the mules, and then to the chaise which remained standing in front of the hostelry: but the drivers gave her to understand, as well as they were able, that it was their intention to pass the night at the inn. She assumed a peremptory air, again indicating the animals and the vehicle, and making every possible sign to show her anxiety to proceed. The manner in which they shook their heads, was that of dogged determination; and Kate, finding that it was useless to urge them farther, beckoned them to bring her trunk from the chaise into the hostelry. This was at once done: and the inebriated landlady guided the fellow who bore the box, up the narrow and dilapidated staircase. Kate followed; and in a few moments was left alone in a wretchedly furnished little bedroom. The candle, which the mistress of the tavern had placed upon the table, dimly lighted that gloomy looking and poverty-stricken chamber. Kate sat down, and abandoned herself to her reflections. Her mind was still full of misgivings: but with her natural courage, she endeavoured to reason herself out of them. She had already received experience to the effect that the roads were bad, and the posting-arrangements for travelling wretchedly incomplete, in Spain:—might it not therefore be, after all, that the highway did really run in the form of a narrow road through this forest? and that previous travellers on this particular day

had exhausted the relays of cattle? She had noticed that the stable was a spacious one, and such as might be expected to belong to a posting-house: she had likewise observed that the mules recently unharnessed from the chase in which she travelled were the only cattle at present in that stable. Then, too, she argued that the muleteers might not choose to carry their beasts another stage until the morning: or else that the arrival of fresh animals, which might be expected in the night, must be awaited in order to furnish a relay. Such were the conjectures by means of which Kate endeavoured to reassure herself: and then she again thought of the people of the house. It was true that the master and the mistress were of no very prepossessing countenances: but it did not follow that they should be criminal on that account. The woman was evidently a drunkard: but it was not to be thence inferred that she was anything worse. Besides, there was something interesting about the servant-girl: it was scarcely possible for any crime to be committed beneath that roof without this girl's knowledge; and Kate Marshall did not think so ill of human nature as to suppose that one of her years and appearance was an habitual accomplice in deeds of turpitude.

These were the reflections which her natural courage and intelligence suggested: but still they were not potent enough to reason away the dark suspicions and gloomy apprehensions which had forced themselves upon her mind. What, however, was she to do? To ensure her safety by flight, was out of the question. She could not quit the hostelry unperceived; and if she were indeed in a nest of robbers and murderers—she shuddered at the idea—they would not hesitate to pounce upon her and consummate their purposed criminality at once if she were to make an attempt at escape. It was therefore absolutely necessary to remain and risk whatever perils might menace her. As for putting off the apparel and retiring to rest—as she had at first intended when ordering her box to be brought into the hostelry—it was out of the question. She felt that if she went to bed, she could not sleep:—and moreover, haunted by misgivings as she was, she must sit up so as

to be prepared for anything that might occur.

She rose from her seat to examine the door: but fastenings there were none. This was a circumstance that did not however tend to confirm her apprehensions, inasmuch as it was by no means likely that such a poverty-stricken place would be furnished with any means of security of that kind. She looked at her watch: it was now half-past ten o'clock; and the sound of voices reached her ears from below. She gently opened the door, and listened: the muleteers, the master, and mistress of the hostelry were laughing and talking—most probably drinking together. Yes, they were drinking: for Kate now caught the sounds of bottles and mugs; and the odour of tobacco smoke likewise reached her. She thought to herself that if those persons were thus indulging in an orgie, it was by no means likely they had any criminal intentions.

Still she resolved not to be thrown off her guard. The window was at the back of the house: she opened it gently and looked forth; the giant trees of the forest were dimly seen through the deep gloom of night. Again the thought of escape entered her mind: but she knew not what might be the height of this window from the ground in the rear of the dwelling. The level of that ground might be much lower than in front: the descent from the casement would therefore be perilous to a degree;—and besides, the savage growling of a dog now reached her ears. She shut the window, and sat down again. Notwithstanding her courage, poor Kate was much dispirited. Even if she were assured of her own personal safety, the delay thus experienced in her journey was sufficient to trouble her sorely. Was it not a matter of life or death on which she was bound? was it not to save one who was dearer to her than her own existence?—and therefore, was not her time most precious? And how, too, was she to while away the long mortal hours that must elapse ere morning dawned? She felt fatigued—but dared not lie down to rest; she needed slumber to enable her to sustain the fatigues of the long journey which yet lay before her—but she felt like a person benighted amongst the snows of Alpine regions, where to yield to sleep is to meet certain death. And then, too, she was

tortured with the reflection that even if this night should pass away in safety for herself, and that the advent of the morn should enable her to smile at the fears which had haunted her,—she might, after all in the meantime undergone, experience failure in her attempt to save the man whom she loved so well: she might in the end be doomed to encounter the saddest and bitterest disappointment! A few hours back her heart had been elate with hope; but now this hope succumbed beneath the dispiriting influences which surrounded her, and became absorbed in the general despondency which engulfed her soul.

Wearily; wearily did the minutes drag their slow length along: again she looked at her watch in the hope that at least an hour had elapsed since last she consulted it: but only half that period had fled—it was eleven o'clock. The sounds of voices still came from below: once more she opened the door to listen; and she heard the mistress of the hostelry talking in the thick, stammering hiccupping manner of complete intoxication. Closing the door again, she took from her trunk a book for the purpose of whiling away the time in its perusal: but she could not settle her attention upon its pages; and once more she found herself debating upon the circumstances in which she was placed. She remembered that these muleteers who accompanied this last relay, had seen her draw forth her well filled purse: she regretted that she had thus displayed it;—and yet she reasoned that even if she had not done so, they must naturally suppose she had ample funds to meet the expenses of her mode of travelling.

Another half-hour passed; and Kate Marshall no longer heard the sounds of voices coming from below. She was almost inclined to lie down and repose her wearied frame: she was deliberating with herself whether by piling her trunk and what little furniture there was in the room against the door, she might not be enabled to guard against a surprise,—when she heard light footsteps approaching across the landing outside.

The latch was raised gently—the servant-girl appeared upon the threshold and as the light of the candle burning upon the table, reached her countenance, Kate immediately saw that it was very pale. Indeed there was something of subdued horror and

deep dismay in the hitherto inexpressive features of the young Spanish woman: so that Miss Marshall was at once smitten with the conviction that peril menaced herself, but that she had found a friend in this girl. The latter—whose name we may as well state to be Paquetta—laid her finger upon her lip, which was naturally of bright vermilion hue, but now ashy colourless, and quivering also: then advancing into the room, she made a sign for Kate not to be alarmed, and extinguished the light. At the same moment she took Miss Marshall's hand, and gently led her forth from the chamber. The crazy boards creaked beneath their feet, light though their steps were; and Paquetta squeezed Kate's hand as an intimation that everything depended upon the noiselessness of their tread. They ascended another flight of stairs: the girl opened a door, still maintaining the utmost caution; and Miss Marshall was guided into a miserable attic where a light was burning. This was evidently Paquetta's own Chamber.

Having closed the door as noiselessly as she had opened it, Paquetta made Kate sit down upon the mean and sordid bed: then placing herself by her side, she gazed upon her with a look of mingled compassion, interest, and affliction. Having now more leisure to contemplate the girl, Miss Marshall saw that there was evidently a profound horror and dismay influencing her: and, Oh! how earnestly she wished that they could understand each other by means of language, so that explanations on Paquetta's part might relieve Kate from the terrible suspense which was devouring her. She however comprehended sufficient to be aware that the girl was acting a friendly part towards her, and that the present proceeding was undertaken with the hope of rescuing her from some danger—but of what nature, could not be exactly conceived, though it was scarcely difficult to surmise that it was threatened on the part of the people of the house. Kate, taking the girl's hand, pressed it warmly; and by her looks endeavoured to show the amount of gratitude she felt towards her.

Paquetta, again making a sign that the utmost caution must be observed, went to the door—opened it gently—and listened. All however was still; and having closed the door again, she

made another sign to the effect that it was necessary to extinguish the light, but that Kate must not suspect her of any treachery. She took Miss Marshall's hand—pressed it to her bosom—and with a look full of eloquence, gave her to understand that she would lay down her own life sooner than injure her. She then extinguished the candle; and the chamber was enveloped in total darkness.

Almost immediately afterwards, steps were heard ascending the lower flight of stairs; and by their uneven pace, and the sounds of a person staggering and stumbling about, Kate had no difficulty in judging that it was the drunken landlady. A door opened and shut on the landing below—the same landing as that on which was situated the chamber whence Miss Marshall had been so mysteriously and ominously fetched away. Then all was still again; and half-an-hour elapsed, during which Kate and Paquetta sat side by side upon the bed,—the latter holding the hands of the former with a kind of firm convulsing pressure in her own. By the way the girl breathed—by the frequent quick starts she gave, as she doubtless fancied she heard some ominous sound—Miss Marshall conjectured that she was expecting something terrible to take place; and it may easily be supposed that her suspense was of the most poignant character—her feelings wrought up to a pitch that was scarcely tolerable. Indeed, the sensation she endured, transcends all power of description: the hideous conviction of imminent danger was excruciating to her soul; and the torture thereof was still more keen and goading—by the vagueness of her ideas as to what the precise nature of that danger could be. That she was really in a nest of murderers, she could scarcely doubt: whether she should ever go forth thence alive, was involved in a horrible uncertainty: how the Spanish girl hoped to save her by the mere change of one room to another, she could not possibly imagine.

We said that about half-an-hour passed from the moment that the ascent of the inebriate mistress of the hostelry was heard,—half-an-hour of complete silence through the house, but of torturing, rending, excruciating suspense for Kate Marshall—and likewise, as it appeared, for her Spanish companion. At the expiration of that

interval, a faint sound—like the creaking of a footstep upon the stairs below—reached their ears. Kate's breath was suspended: nor could she catch the breathing of the girl, which was evidently suspended also:—but she felt the clasp of her companion's fingers tighten spasmodically on her own hands, as if under the influence of intense and awful horror. They listened, we say, with suspended breath: Miss Marshall felt her bosom upheaved, as it were, with that terrible state of mind,—upheaved, and remaining so: for a fearful consternation was upon her. Paquetta drew closer to her

now clinging to her as if conscious that something dreadful was occurring or about to take place. And there, in the darkness where they enshrouded,—in the black darkness which the shade of the trees produced, shutting out what soever glimmering light there might be of moon or stars on the face of heaven. And that darkness appeared to be of even Egyptian depth—a darkness that might be felt: for it was associated with the idea that some crime of congenial blackness was about to be consummated!

And now a door was heard to creak on its hinges on the landing below: all was still again for a few instants—and then followed stifling, suffocating sounds, accompanied by strugglings, as of two human beings together, one endeavouring to smother out the life from the other. And therewith was blended the noise of a bed agitating, and creaking, and swaying to and fro, beneath the weight of the strugglers;—and this lasted for more than a minute, during which Paquetta clung with the tenacity of horror and affright to Kate Marshall—thus clinging with her left arm, while her right hand was placed upon Kate's mouth—a dread and significant intimation that no word nor cry must go forth thence. But from the girl's dreadful condition of mind altogether, Kate could not help fancying, even amidst her own horrible thoughts, that something was taking place different from what her companion had at first apprehended, and of a nature which, though fully sustaining the tenseness of her feelings, had nevertheless turned them all into another channel.

Those sounds had ceased: stillness prevailed again for a few moments; and then a sudden ejaculation of horror rang through the house. But

at the very same moment, the rapid trampling of horses reached the ears of the appalled and dismayed Paquetta and Kate. Those steeds galloped up to the front of the tavern; and then the Spanish girl, with an exclamation of joy, sprang to the window—threw it open—and looking forth, cried out something, which by its rending tones of entreaty, struck Kate as being a prayer for succour. She also flew to the little latticed casement, which was in the front of the house; and flinging her glances forth, she felt that she was saved: for the rays of a light gleaming from one of the lower windows, were reflected by the sword-hilts of a body of mounted police.

The door of the hostelry was immediately burst in by these officials: and Paquetta, flinging herself with wild joy upon Kate's bosom, fainted in her arms.

CHAPTER CXLII.

EXPLANATIONS.

INFINITE were the confusion, the din, and the bustle which followed this forcible entry of the Spanish *gendarmes* into the tavern. Kate, while doing her best to restore her companion to consciousness, heard the rush of footsteps up the first flight of stairs; also the loud and menacing voices of the police, and the despairing ejaculations of the landlord. In a few minutes hasty and heavy footsteps ascended the flight to the attic—the door opened—and a *gendarme*, with a candle appeared upon the threshold. He spoke to Kate Marshall; but she understood him not—and shook her head to make him comprehend that she was a foreigner unacquainted with the Spanish tongue. At this conjuncture Paquetta came back to consciousness: the light which the official carried, showed Kate where there was a petcher of water in the room: she hastened to give the young woman some of it to drink—and in a few minutes more she was completely recovered. Then Paquetta and the *gendarme* exchanged rapid observations; and the official beckoned her and Kate to descend.

They obeyed his signal; and on reaching the landing below, they perceived the innkeeper in the custody of two of the police. Despair and horror were depicted upon his countenance: he looked

the most abject wretch alive. A glance, flung down the staircase, showed Kate that the two muleteers were also in the hands of other officers; and thus was it but too evident that she had experienced a truly miraculous escape from the hands of a set of murderous monsters. But there was yet another phase in the night's proceedings to meet her view. For on the bed in the room originally allotted to herself, and whence Paquetta had so noiselessly and mysteriously conducted her away upon that bed was stretched the corpse of the landlady, her countenance blackened and swollen, presenting a hideous and loathsome spectacle, with all the evidences of having been smothered or strangled. Now did the terrific truth flash to the comprehension of the horrified Kate Marshall—the mystery was cleared up—she comprehended it all!

The measures of the *gendarmes* were promptly taken. A couple of them hastened to attach the mules to the vehicle and into this Kate Marshall and Paquetta by their direction, entered. Kate's trunk was not forgotten: indeed she was treated with the utmost courtesy and respect; and she comprehended that it was as a witness her presence was thus to be required elsewhere. One of the *gendarmes* drove the chaise: the muleteers and the innkeeper, their arms pinioned with cords, were compelled to march on foot in the midst of the mounted band of police, who took good care to keep a firm hold of the long ends of the ropes which bound them. We should add that no other persons belonged to the hostelry besides those already mentioned,—the landlord himself having been accustomed to act as his own hostler—the murdered woman and the servant-girl performing all the domestic duties of so limited an establishment. Before the party quitted the house where the terrific tragedy had occurred, the doors were carefully secured, the police taking the keys away with them,—thus leaving the corpse of the murdered woman behind.

As the chaise rolled on through the darkness of the utmost of her power the immensity of that gratitude which she experienced towards her young companion, to whom she indeed deeply felt that she owed her life. She embraced her—she pressed her hands to her lips—she caressed her in the most affectionate and endearing manner; she could not lavish too many proofs of friendship, love and attachment upon one to whom she lay under such incalculable obligations.

Paquetta had by this time recovered her fortitude and presence of mind, and the joy she experienced on account of the providential arrival of the *gendarmes* absorbed a portion of the otherwise stupendous horror which the tragedy was but too well calculated to excite. Such was also the case with Miss Marshall; and her deliverance from the dreadful dangers which had evidently menaced her, appeared to have the force and significance of an omen of good in respect to the enterprise which she had in hand on behalf of her lover.

The equipage and the police, with their prisoners, proceeded to the nearest town, which was about three miles distant,—beyond the verge of the forestland situated on the highway. Indeed, as Kate subsequently discovered, this was the town where she ought to have halted, had not the muleteers diverged from the proper route to take her to a den where murderous work was purposed to be done—and where indeed a victim had been made that night, though not the one whom blackest turpitude had intended to immolate to its greed for gold. On reaching this town the equipage stopped at a tavern, the inmates of which were summoned from their beds to receive the guests: for Paquetta remained there with Kate Marshall. A chamber was speedily provided for them; and they shared the same couch—while the police conducted their prisoners to the gaol.

On the following morning Miss Marshall and Paquetta were summoned to the office of the Alcalde, or Mayor, who was prepared to examine into the occurrences of the preceding night. An interpreter was present to assist Miss Marshall in making her deposition; and through this medium she explained how the muleteers had borne her to the lonely hostelry in the forest—how she was compelled to remain there and the incidents which had subsequently taken place, until the arrival of the *gendarmes*. From this same interpreter she afterwards learnt those particulars which we shall proceed to record. But first of all we must observe that the muleteers, confessing their guilt, revealed such details as threw additional light upon the character of the hostelry and the previous night's tragedy.

It appeared that the innkeeper and his wife had tenanted that hostelry

for about a fortnight, during which time they were much busied with several numbers of the *gentlemen*, who were frequently in the habit of conveying away strangers to that den of iniquity, where the unfortunate victims were confined for the sake of what never they could have shown them. Until within six months of the date of which we are writing, the servants were kept at the hostelry; but in consequence of the intemperate habits of the woman, her husband was at length compelled to take a female assistant. Through the recommendation of a shopkeeper in the town, who little knew, however, to what place he was sending a servant, Paquetta obtained the situation; and during those six months that she was there, she saw nothing to excite her suspicion as to the evil character of her master and mistress. On the particular night to which we are referring, Paquetta overheard some observation between the innkeeper and his wife, immediately after Kate Marshall's arrival, which suddenly filled her with the darkest misgiving. She however had presence of mind sufficient to conceal the suspicion which had thus been engendered; but she resolved to remain on the watch. Though the words which had caught her ears, were vague and indistinct, she nevertheless felt assured that Miss Marshall's life was menaced; and this idea acquiring in her mind, will account for those looks of interest which she fixed upon Kate when laying the supper cloth, and which Kate mistook for regard or curiosity. At one moment Paquetta thought of flying from the hostelry, and hastening to the town, to give information to the police; but at that late hour she feared to venture through the forest—she moreover dreaded lest she should be pursued and overtaken by the landlord, who in that case would have secured his own safety by making away with her; and in addition to these reasons for abandoning her first thought of flight, was the consideration that she might, after all, be mistaken, and had put a wrong meaning on the few vague and indistinct words which her ear had caught. So she tarried at the hostelry—and kept upon the watch. After Kate had been conducted up to the bed-chamber, the girl listened to what was going on, but without being observed: and her worst

fears were speedily confirmed. She heard her master speak to the muleteers in a way which corroborated her dark suspicions : she caught the whispered explanation which the landlord gave of how the plan was to be carried out.

"He said,"—quoting Paquetta's own words in giving her deposition to the Alcalde,—"care must be taken that I should obtain no inkling of what was going on : it was therefore too dangerous to cut the English woman's throat, as it would be impossible to efface the stains of blood. He accordingly declared his intention of stealing into her chamber when she was asleep, and smothering her with a bolster. This, he said, he felt convinced of, being able to do without any noise to alarm me. The remainder of the plan was thus laid down :—the muleteers were to get the equipage ready at about two in the morning ; the corpse should be placed inside the vehicle, to be borne into the depths of the forest, and there buried : and when I came down at the usual hour in the morning, I was to be told that the traveller had taken her departure, leaving a gratuity for me, which trifling sum the landlord would accordingly place in my hand. Such was the horrible project which I overheard : and for a while I was utterly bewildered how to act. I was nevertheless determined to do all I could to save the English lady, even though the attempt should fail and my own life should be forfeited to my master's vengeance. I saw that there were no means of issuing forth unperceived from the house—no means therefore of getting Miss Marshall off in safety. The only chance of accomplishing my purpose," continued Paquetta, "was to induce Miss Marshall to remove stealthily up to my own chamber. I calculated that when my master should penetrate to her room and find she was not there he would conclude that she had by some means or another suspected his design and made her escape. I so reasoned to myself that if he could come up to my door and ask whether I had seen her, he would be contented with the denial which I could boldly and firmly give ; and as I had no reason to suppose that I had been a listener to his plans, there was the greater probability of his

putting faith in that denial on my part, and adopting the conclusion that the lady had escaped of her own accord and unassisted by any one else. I accordingly entered Miss Marshall's chamber, expecting to find that she had at least laid herself down, even if she were not disapparelled ; I was therefore surprised to find her sitting up. It was however all the more suitable to my purpose, inasmuch as there was no need for delay ; and as I saw at once that some suspicion was agitating in her own mind, I had not the slightest trouble in making her comprehend the necessity of following me. I extinguished the light in her room, so as to create as much confusion as possible on the part of my master when he should proceed thither ; and by bewildering him to the utmost of my power, render him all the more accessible to the belief that Miss Marshall had fled. For a moment I entertained the idea of putting open the window of her room—tying the bed-clothes together—and letting them hang forth, to confirm the impression that she had escaped : but a second thought convinced me that this stratagem would defeat itself, inasmuch as there was a savage dog in the back premises that would have torn her to pieces if she had really sought to fly in that direction. I therefore abandoned that idea. When Miss Marshall and I were seated together in my own chamber, we heard the landlady scramble up the staircase to the first landing ; and methought that she entered her own room, which was next to the one which Miss Marshall had so recently quitted. Half-an-hour afterwards we again heard footsteps upon the stairs : then I knew the crisis to be at hand—or at least I fancied that my master would steal into the room, to find no one there. My emotions may be conceived when to my ears were borne the subdued and stifling sounds which but too intelligibly proclaimed that murder's work was being done. I comprehended it all : the miserable wretch was killing his own wife ! For an instant I was on the point of shrieking out—of rushing to the door—of tearing open—and at all risks of raising an alarm. But then to my mind flashed the conviction that such a course on my part would be followed by the murder of Miss Marshall and myself. Oh ! it was terrible to be thus compelled to remain silent and quiet while human life was being taken : but

there was no alternative. Life is dear to me ; I had vowed also to do my best to save Miss Marshall's;—and shocking though it were to adopt such a course, it was absolutely necessary to suffer *one* life to be smothered away, rather than ensure the certain taking of *two*—and one of these two my own ! The wild cry which burst from the landlord's lips bore to my ears the conviction that he had *just then* discovered his horrible mistake and while that cry was yet ringing through the house, the body of *gendarmes* galloped up to the door. Not an instant did I lose in speaking to them from the window, and imploring succour, as murder was being done beneath that roof : and it must have been Providence itself who sent them at that critical moment to bait their horses at the inn,—for it was the means of ensuring our safety and uprooting a nest of assassins."

But little more remains to be told in order to make the reader fully acquainted with the details of that tragedy in the Spanish forest. From the statement of one of the muleteers it was gathered—as indeed previously surmised—that the innkeeper's wife, being completely overcome with liquor, was ordered by her husband to get up to bed, so that the house might be quiet and the murderous scheme carried into execution as soon as possible. It was but too clear that the miserable woman staggered into the first chamber to the door of which her uncertain steps brought her ; and throwing herself upon the bed, at once fell into a profound sleep. From this slumber she was only awakened for a few swift brief passing moments, to struggle and writhe in death-agonies beneath the bolster which her miscreant husband retained with tremendous force over her countenance. There can be little doubt that on her ceasing to move, he felt amongst her garments for the purse which he supposed to be concealed there ; and that the texture of the raiment suddenly sent the hideous, horrible, blasting conviction to his mind that it was his own wife whom he had thus assassinated !

All the depositions being duly taken down in the presence of the Mayor. Miss Marshall intimated, through the medium of the interpreter, that it was of vital consequence for her to be allowed to continue her journey to Madrid ; and she therefore hoped that

the purposes of justice might be served without any farther detention on her part. This request was promptly acceded to,—there being ample evidence against the accused to ensure their conviction. The Mayor was so much pleased with the conduct of Paquetta throughout the transaction, that he introduced her to his wife, who proposed to take her into her service in the capacity of lady's maid. The girl, being an orphan, and entirely dependent on her own resources, joyfully and gratefully accepted the proposition. Before parting from Paquetta, Kate Marshall—speaking by means of the interpreter—offered to make her a present of as large a sum from her purse as she could possibly spare : but the young Spanish girl replied, through the same medium, that there were services which one fellow-creature could render to another of too holy and sacred a character to be recompensed by gold ; and that the service she had been enabled to afford Miss Marshall was one of these. In short she positively declined to accept anything ; and Kate parted from her with the most affectionate and lively demonstrations of gratitude.

In order to finish this episode without the necessity of recurring to it, we may as well observe that in the course of a few weeks after the tragedy in the forest, the innkeeper and the two muleteers expiated their crimes upon the scaffold,—death being inflicted by the infamous process of the garotte.

CHAPTER CXLIV.

THE MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR

KATE MARSHALL arrived safely in the Spanish capital ; and took up her residence at a modest but respectable tavern to which Count Christoval had directed her amongst other parting instructions which he had given her in Catalonia. One of the principal reasons which he had for recommending her to this hostelry, was that the landlady spoke English with tolerable accuracy ; and being a good-hearted woman, was certain to afford Miss Marshall all necessary aid and information.

It was night when Kate arrived at Madrid on the day after the examination by the Alcalde ; and on the

ing morning she repaired with the porter as her guide, to the residence of the Marquis of Villebelle. Infinite was her disappointment on learning that the nobleman had left the day before for Paris, in company with the Marchioness; and that they were likely to remain at least for four weeks—even if the Marquis should return to that diplomatic post at all, he having the prospect of a far and more lucrative appointment. It was a terrible blow for poor Kate: she knew not what to do; but, dispirited and desponding, she retraced her way to the hostelry.

She was not however a young woman to abandon herself to utter despair; though seriously afflicted she summoned all her energies to her aid, that she should be lost in adopting some specific course. She sat down and wrote letters,—one to Count Christoval at Barcelona, beseeching his advice; the other to the Marquis of Villebelle, which, on the landlady's suggestion, she addressed to the care of the Minister of Foreign Affairs at Paris, it being certain that the functionary Villebelle's first visit would be paid on his arrival in the French capital; and as he was not likely to travel day and night without commission, the letter would in all probability reach its destination, before

the following day. Kate had the satisfaction of receiving a letter from Don Christoval at Barcelona, written how long before he could of course have read her's. It was to the effect that he had completely succeeded with the Captain-General in procuring a respite for Edward Russell until the result of proceedings on her lover's behalf should be made known. Don Diego moreover informed Kate that the Captain-General was vested with sufficient authority to extend this respite for six weeks, which he had no doubt would be done; and therefore the Count expressed a hope that in the interval the Marchioness would find her endeavours crowned with complete success. The intelligence thus conveyed in Count Christoval's letter, was satisfactory even under her hopes, under present circumstances: for there was ample time in the meantime for the Marquis of Villebelle to interest himself in her lover's behalf. She felt assured he would do so; and she awaited in confidence the arrival of letters from the nobleman in due course. But

before any came, she received another communication from Don Diego Christoval, in answer to her own. It was to the effect that he himself possessed not the slightest interest with the Ministers then in power, their politics and his being at extreme variance: otherwise he would have before volunteered to exert himself in those quarters. He gave Kate to understand that if he were thus to take up her cause, such a step would only prejudice it and lead to a certain refusal. It was therefore useless for him to make the attempt: while on the other hand, it was of the highest consequence that he should remain at Barcelona in order to prevent the Captain-General from signing the warrant of execution until the full period of respite which he was enabled to grant should have elapsed. The Count's letter, which was penned in a strain of true brotherly sympathy, concluded by encouraging such hope as he dared hold out, and proffering such condolence as it was proper for him to express.

A few days afterwards, Kate received letters from Paris. One was from the Marquis of Villebelle, couched in the kindest terms, and enclosing a note of the most urgent entreaty to the Minister of the Interior, beseeching that the boon which the bearer thereof might solicit should be granted. The other letter was from Constance, whom we suppose we must call the Marchioness of Villebelle; and this was penned in the warmest and most affectionate strain,—assuring Kate that neither herself nor her husband would ever forget the services they had received at her hands when at Dover, and proffering the sincerest sympathy. This letter also contained an enclosure; it was addressed to the wife of the Minister of the Interior, beseeching this lady to espouse the cause of Miss Marshall and to use her influence with her husband to procure the grant of the boon which would be requested. Both these letters—we mean that of the Marquis to the Minister, and that of the Marchioness to the Minister's wife—were written in English; thus proving that those for whom they were intended, were conversant with that language,—and also serving to convince Kate (they being left unsealed for her perusal) that the cause which she had at heart was espoused in no lukewarm manner by the generous

friends whose interest she had thus secured.

Miss Marshall arrayed herself in the handsomest garb she had brought with her from England; and indeed she looked uncommonly handsome. Her fine shape, rich in its modelled but well-adjusted proportions, was set off to the best advantage: while the flutter of hope and suspense sent up a carnation hue to her cheeks. When her toilet was completed, she repaired in a hired vehicle to the private residence of the Minister of the Interior,—this being about noon, and her kind hearted landlady informing her that it was the best hour for waiting upon that functionary. On arriving at the Minister's house, Miss Marshall was conducted to a waiting-room, where some half dozen other persons desirous to see the great man, were seated, and each of these was summoned in turn to the reception apartment. At length Kate found herself alone in the waiting-room: and her heart palpitated with still more anxious flutterings than hitherto, as she said to herself that the next time the door opened, it would be to admit the usher who was to summon her into the presence of him who with a breath could restore her to perfect happiness or plunge her into the deepest abyss of woe. Half-an-hour elapsed while she thus remained alone; and it appeared to her the longest half-hour she had ever passed in her life. But at length the door opened—the usher made his appearance—she was conducted across a spacious landing—a door was thrown open—and she entered a large and splendidly furnished cabinet, where the minister of the Interior was negligently lounging in a large armchair, and a secretary sat writing at a desk.

When a person is about to enter for the first time into the presence of a celebrated or highly-placed individual, the imagination invariably depicts to itself some portraiture as the ideal of such individual's appearance; and with the possessor of Ministerial function, is generally associated the idea of at least a mature age, if not an advanced one. Thus was it that Kate Marshall had fancied she was about to behold an elderly or an old man, with gray hair—a calm and dignified expression of countenance—and sedate manners, accompanied with a certain degree of awe-inspiring reserve. The portraiture she had thus in imagination

drawn, was not justified in any one single point by the actual reality. The Minister of the Interior was a young man, scarcely thirty years of age—with a profusion of raven black hair—a glossy moustache, and well curled whiskers. His features were regular—his countenance pale, with a slight tinge of sallowness: his eyes were dark and full of fire—while somewhat bluish circles in which they appeared to be set, denoted either the wear and tear of close application to business, or else the workings of strong passions combined with habits of dissipation. He was of slight figure—short of stature, but well made. His looks had a certain vivid keenness: his glances were of penetrating sharpness, as if he sought to pierce through and through the soul of any one accosting him. He was dressed in deep black—but with a certain air of fashionable elegance not altogether devoid of pretension.

We may here as well observe that the Minister was one of those unscrupulous ambitious political adventurers, who, taking advantage of the disturbed state of Spanish politics, and attaching themselves to the faction which was then dominant, had suddenly arisen from comparative obscurity into power and importance. Only a year had elapsed since the storm of insurrections, sweeping over Spain, had terminated in the abdication of the Regency by the liberal-minded and magnanimous Espartero: and the reign of military terrorism established by Narvaez and the adherents of Queen Christina, was now rampant. Men of unscrupulous dispositions were required as the chief political agents of this revived despotism; and the present Minister of the Interior was one of these. He had been the editor of a journal noted for its violent animosity to Espartero: at the beginning of the insurrection he had done his best to defame the character of that true-hearted patriot; and his services were rewarded by a portfolio in the Cabinet. But his induction into the Ministry was not merely a recompense for his past conduct; it had likewise been brought about by the want of such personages as himself to carry out the views of the new regime. Of all the circumstances Kate Marshall was ignorant,—she knowing but little of Spanish politics; and the landlady of the hotel, being too much accustomed to behold mere adventurers suddenly rising into high places, had not thought it worth while to give her English guest

my detailed information upon the object.

It is not the custom for persons seeking an interview with a Spanish Minister at his own private residence, to send in their cards, nor make any previous announcement of the object of their visit. Thus, until Kate Marshall entered that room, the high functionary whom he have described, had not the faint notion who was about to appear before him. He was evidently struck with the handsome person of the English woman; and his dark eyes, having surveyed her from head to foot, settled upon her countenance, where the colour was coming and going in rapid transitions, cording as she was swayed by the varied emotions excited in her heart. He would much rather have found the Minister to be a personage corresponding with the portraiture which her imagination had drawn, than what she now found him to be; for there was something about him but little encouraging to one who had so important a boon to solicit. In a word, he seemed an individual who would be merciless and implacable if he chose; and poor Kate was for the first moments tortured by her apprehensions. He did not at once address her; but with his eyes fixed upon her countenance, evidently waited for her to give explanation of her business. With trembling hands she drew forth the letter which the Marquis of Villebelle had sent, addressed to the Minister; and as she presented it, her looks fell beneath the searching—almost burning—glowing gaze which he riveted upon it. Then his eyes settled upon the paper; and having perused it, he made an sign for the secretary to retire. The command was obeyed; and Kate was left alone with the Minister of the Interior.

"And you are Miss Marshall, I presume?" he said, speaking in very excellent English. "Be seated;"—and he indicated a chair close by his own, almost nearly opposite,—so that by leaning slightly round, he could still see his fair applicant from head to foot, as she tremblingly, took that seat. "The Marquis of Villebelle," he went on to observe, "has written very strongly on your behalf. Will you explain the nature of the boon I seek at my hands?"

"Your Excellency may perhaps be aware," responded Kate, speaking in nervous accents, and still with looks

bent down beneath the ardent gaze which was fixed upon her and filled her mind with a vague trouble,—“your Excellency is perhaps aware that an English sailor named Edward Russell——”

"Enough, Miss Marshall!" he gently interrupted: "I am acquainted with all the incidents;"—then, pointing to the desk at which his secretary had been writing, he added, "Amongst those papers, lie the documents connected with the case. I learn from his Excellency the Captain-General of Catalonia, that by virtue of the authority invested in him, he has temporarily suspended the execution of the sentence. Can you point out to me any substantial reasons wherefore a commutation of the sentence should be effected—or," added the Minister, more slowly, and as Kate thought, with a strange significance of look, "a pardon should be granted? But first of all I should perhaps inquire wherefore you yourself are so interested in this man? The Marquis of Villebelle merely represents you as being thus deeply interested in him, leaves all explanations to be given by yourself."

"Edward Russell is my affianced husband," answered Kate, the colour now mantling vividly upon her cheeks, down which tears were at the same time trickling.

"Ah! the romance of a love-affair!" ejaculated the Minister, with a smile; and as Miss Marshall raised her eyes at the moment, she thought that smile was somewhat encouraging.

"Oh, sir!" she exclaimed; "I have travelled from my native place in England, with the hope of saving a life which is dearer than my own! I have endured and suffered much—I have journeyed day and night—I have deemed no fatigue too great, no peril too menacing, to be encountered in the prosecution of my object! In the midst of a forest my life was within a hair's breadth of succumbing to the murderous designs of assassins——"

"Ah, I recollect!" exclaimed the Minister. "The papers have been forwarded to me; and methought when I ere now read your name in the Marquis of Villebelle's letter, it was not altogether unfamiliar. Yes—I have perused those official documents, sent by the Alcalde of the town where the investigation took place; and from

the depositions it is indeed but too clear that you experienced a very narrow escape. But you must love this Edward Russell very much that you have dared such fatigues and so many dangers on his behalf?"

"Oh! I have endured more than has come to your Excellency's knowledge," cried Kate, thus alluding to her arrest by the Catalan banditti: but instantaneously recollecting that this was an episode to which, for Count Christoval's sake, she ought not even to have glanced, she quickly added, "But no matter, sir! all that I have undergone, will be esteemed light indeed, if the result should prove favourable to my object. Oh, let me not implore your Excellency in vain!"

The young woman—full of acute suspense, and not knowing what to hope at the hands of this man who gazed upon her in a way that filled her heart with vague uneasiness—spoke in vehement and impassioned accents; while the tears continued to trace their crystal pathway down her cheeks. The Minister still surveyed her with an attention which might be merely replete with compassionate interest, but which nevertheless had a certain expression of libertine ardour; and this expression it was that caused the trouble which was racking the afflicted applicant.

"You are too intelligent, Miss Marshall," he said, "not to comprehend that this offender—to use no harsher term—has rendered himself obnoxious to the severest criminal laws of the country. I am aware it was argued in his defence that no life was taken by *his* special hand: but he was the leader of a party committing an unlawful act—and the weapons of his followers spilt the blood of Spanish subjects. Were he a Spaniard himself—were he possessed of high interest and influential connections—I should still be unable to listen favourably to any appeal made on his behalf. What, then, can I say to you? With every disposition to attend to the strong and urgent recommendations of my friend the Marquis of Villebelle—with every disposition, too, to serve a young lady of your appearance—I am afraid——"

"No, sir—do not crush me with despair at once! Do not—do not, I entreat you!"—and Kate Marshall fell upon her knees before the Minister.

"Rise," he said, taking her hand: and as she obeyed him, he still

continued to hold that hand in his own—while at the same instant an unmistakable expression of passionate desire glowed upon his features. "Perhaps," he went on to observe, "a means may be found——"

Kate understood him in a moment. It was no longer possible to doubt his meaning: it was conveyed in the significance of his look—the pressure which she felt her hand was sustaining—his entire appearance. In short, that high public functionary had revealed himself as an unprincipled libertine, about to make an overture which was comprehended even before it was uttered. Kate snatched away her hand; the flush of indignation glowed upon her features; and she was turning away, when, suddenly smitten by the idea—it was a last faint hope—that she might possibly have misinterpreted his meaning and done him an injustice, she fixed her eyes steadily upon his countenance, saying, "Surely, sir,—surely you will not suffer me to depart with the conviction that there is no mercy in the soul of a Spanish statesman!"

"Sit down once more, Miss Marshall," responded the Minister, suddenly becoming cold and haughty: then, as she resumed her seat, he went on to observe, "I explained to you ere now, that even if the plea for mercy on behalf of this offender were backed by high family interest, I should not know how to concede the point. You yourself must comprehend the difficulty of obtaining such a concession. There are no grounds upon which a pardon can be accorded, or a commutation of the sentence be decreed. But if it would be difficult to yield to an interest really powerful, how can you expect me to give an affirmative answer to the intercession of a stranger? Should I not be seriously compromising myself? should I not be liable to the attacks of those ill-conditioned persons who are ever ready to hold up public men to scorn and hatred, to suit their own factious aims? In a word, should I not be running an immense risk by diverting the tide of justice from its course, in a case which presents not the least ground for such a proceeding on my part?"

"I am aware of all this, sir," responded Kate; "but Oh! the satisfaction which your own heart will experience——"

She stopped short, as a half-scornful

smile began wreathing the moustached lip of the Minister. Hope, which had again been rising—though faintly enough, it is true—in her bosom, sank down again, like the wing wearied bird from some ineffectual soaring into a celestial region; and she felt that her heart was weeping tears of blood, at the same time that a fresh gush of the crystal tide poured forth from her eyes.

"Yes," the Minister resumed: "great indeed is the risk that I should run: and permit me to remind you, Miss Marshall, that the days of romance are over. We live in times of stern reality in times when the actions of individuals are necessarily influenced by a certain degree of personal selfishness. The Marquis of Villebelle, were he now present would himself assure you that the boon you solicit is one which no Minister would be likely to grant—save and except under circumstances of an extraordinary character. In a word, you ask a life. What if I grant it? Is there to be no recompense for me?"

"Yes, sir," responded Kate, now speaking with renewed firmness; "your reward will be found in the consciousness of having performed a deed which will raise up two of your fellow creatures from the abyss of woe, to the height of exultant happiness. And in the warm gratitude of our hearts——"

"Oh, that universal word *gratitude*!" exclaimed the Minister scornfully: "it is uttered by every one who has a favour to ask. Young lady, do you not reflect that every criminal now in a Spanish gaol, might send a relative, or a friend, to demand of me a similar boon, and offer a similar reward,—the boon being a life which is implored—the recompense, gratitude! In good sooth I should thrive upon so much gratitude, were it of a substantial, a tangible, and a serviceable value. But it is nothing—a mere airy word—an empty name! Must I once more remind you that individual actions are now ruled by selfishness? You ask me a life: the favour you demand is immense—the greatest, the highest which it is in mortal's power to bestow. And in return, you offer a recompense the meanest, the poorest, the paltriest, the most contemptible!"

"No, sir!" murmured Kate, rising from her seat, and almost convulsed with affliction; "if the treasures of the whole world were at my disposal, I would lay them at your feet; but alas! I have not where withal to give you

such reward as may be commensurate with the boon that I implore."

"Gold?—who spoke of gold?" said the Minister, contemptuously. "I have enough. It was not to paltry dross that I for a moment alluded. Were you an old wrinkled hag, and if you were enabled to lay at my feet countless sums of the yellow metal, I should at once return an abrupt negative to your demand. But is there no reward which a young and beautiful woman can bestow?"

Now, sir, I dare not for another moment seek to blind myself to the true nature of your meaning!"—and as Kate Marshall thus spoke, her whole appearance indicated the sudden uprising of womanly pride and dignity. "You wield great and almost sovereign power—you have authority of life and death: but your present conduct towards a friendless foreign woman who implores a boon at your hands, is not the finest chapter in your career. He whom I love must perhaps die—and my own heart will be broken: but the time may come when your Excellency will look back with remorseful sorrow upon the incident of this day, and when perhaps you will regret that you have thus planted a dagger into a bosom already too deeply wounded."

Having thus spoken, Kate Marshall was moving towards the door, when the Minister exclaimed, "Stop! Perhaps *you* may yet think better of your own conduct—and *then* it will be too late. Remember that with one stroke of the pen, I can give you the life which you demand: but also with a stroke of the pen, I can order it to be taken away within the week that is passing!"

"But you will not do this deed of cruelty!" cried Kate, once again having recourse to intercession. "No—you will not do it! Ah, sir! you are a married man—you have a wife who doubtless love you——,"

"It is useless, young lady," interrupted the Minister, "for us to continue arguing thus. Understand well your own position—think not of mine. Your lover lies under sentence of death: with the least sacrifice on your part you can save him—a sacrifice, too the secret of which need never be known to him——"

"Enough, sir!" ejaculated Kate Marshall, once more displaying all the

"Stop yet one moment, Miss Mirshall!" said the Minister, as she was turning away: "It is not the proposition which I am about to renew—but a piece of advice that I am about to give. Beware how you write to the Marquis of Villebelle ought that shall be derogatory of myself. Remember that I have the power of intercepting your correspondence at the Post office, and of suppressing it if unpalatable to me. Beware likewise how, on going forth from this cabinet, you breathe a single

The Minister of the interior had listened coldly in one sense, but with impassioned feelings in another, to the long, the eloquent, and the reproachful

word to my prejudice: for again I say, remember that I have powers whereof I should not fail to make use. And those powers I would exercise ruthlessly—mercilessly. Your chamber should be invaded by *gendarmes*—ignominiously should you be hurried through Spain in their custody—and turned adrift on the frontier of Portugal or of France. If therefore you have a friend, a confidant, or an adviser in the Spanish capital, see that you explain in guarded terms the particular of this interview. Madrid is vast—its buildings are numerous—but there is not a wall which hath not ears to drink in whatsoever may be spoken to the disadvantage of those who occupy high places. Follow my counsel—and you will not be molested: disobey me in only a single tittle, and you shall be made to rue the consequences. And now one word more! From a certain date the Captain-General of Catalonia had power to suspend your lover's sentence for three weeks:—of that period ten days have already expired! It would not be safe for you to suffer more than another week at the very outside to elapse ere you definitely resolve upon the course you will adopt. During the week, therefore which is now to ensue I shall at any instant be prepared to receive another visit from Miss Marshall. But if you come again—and you *will* come—let it be with the fore-knowledge that arguments is useless, intercession vain, upbraiding a mere airy nothing. If you come, therefore, let it be with the firm resolution of adopting the only alternative that may save your lover's life."

During the delivery of this infamous speech, Kate Marshall's countenance expressed, as she listened, every variety of feeling which the several portions thereof were but too well calculated to excite. Pain the most mentally acute—indignation the most highly wrought—astonishment the most confounding—disgust the most ineffable—abhorrence the most intense—all in their turn were thus experienced by the young English woman. When the speech was over, she was about to turn away, and in silence take her departure: but she felt that she could not thus withdraw unavenged by the only weapons which she had to wield—namely, *words*!—and therefore she tarried a few moments

longer to give expression to her sentiments.

"I had read and I had heard," she said, with flashing eyes and flushing cheeks. "that Spain is degenerate: but sunken indeed it must be below the uttermost extreme of my conception, when amongst its rulers it reckons such a man as thou! What? you would violate the sanctity of correspondence entrusted to the very means of conveyance which the Government itself monopolizes, leaving none other open? You commit a hideous crime by proposing to barter a human life against a woman's honour; and yet if the injured one dares speak of your enormity, you threaten to treat her as if *she* were the culprit and *you* were the law's vindicator? And you tell me that you know I shall come back to you—and that when I do come, I must be prepared to surrender myself without another murmur to your arms?—Oh, sir! is it possible that you could address me thus and not avert your looks in shame?"

Having thus spoken, Kate Marshall turned away from the minister's presence, and issued forth from the cabinet. Had she paused another moment to observe his countenance, she would have seen that so far from being moved or affected by the way in which she had spoken, there was only a slight perceptible scornful wreathing of his lip; and as the door closed behind her, he said to himself, as if in allusion to her prideful indignation, "Nevertheless, she will come back again."

And in the afternoon of that same day, the Minister of the interior appeared in the Chamber of Deputies; and in an eloquent speech proposed a measure for giving an impulse to the moral and religious improvement of the people. And any one to have heard him dilate with all his oratorical power upon the necessity of encouraging lofty, refined, and honourable notions amongst the masses, would have thought that he himself must be deeply imbued with the sense of his high and important subject.

CHAPTER CXLV.

THE MINISTER'S WIFE.

MISS MARSHALL issued from the private dwelling of the Minister of the Interior with mingled feelings of anguish and indignation. Such was indeed her

state of mind. She forgot she had about her the letter of the Marchioness de Villebelle, addressed to the Minister's wife. She entered the hired vehicle which had brought her thither, and was already half-way back to the hotel, when the circumstance of this letter flashed to her mind. Hope for a moment sprang up within her: but it vanished almost as quickly, as a second thought suggested that no wife, however excellent-hearted, could possibly wield any influence for good over such a husband as the man whom she had just left. She was almost inclined to abstain from delivering the letter altogether,—when she reflected that not a single stone should be left unturned that might, even by the accomplishment of the aim which was dearer than her own life: and she resolved to present this letter.

Not choosing however, to return to the Ministerial abode in the vehicle which might be recognised by the Minister himself from the windows—supposing that he had watched her departure.—and being also unable to make the driver understand that she wished to return thither, Kate stopped the chaise and alighted. She remembered the proper direction to be pursued; and after a quarter of an hour's walk, came once more in sight of the mansion. At that very instant she beheld the Minister issue forth and enter his carriage, which immediately rolled away: for he was now proceeding to the Chamber of Deputies. She was glad that he had thus left his house, at the time that she was about to seek an interview with his lady; and when the carriage was out of sight she proceeded to the private entrance of the dwelling. Mentioning the name of the Minister's wife, she was at once conducted up a handsome staircase, into a large and elegantly furnished apartment,—where the domestic, perceiving she could not speak the Spanish tongue, politely motioned her to be seated. She waited in that room for nearly half-an-hour—at the expiration of which interval, the door opened and a lady made her appearance.

The Minister's wife was a remarkably fine woman, of about Kate's own age—namely, between four and five-and-twenty. She was tall, well made, and of similar proportions to those of Miss Marshall. Indeed, her contours were precisely of that same Hebe-richness adjusted to the most admirable symmetry, which characterized the Englishwoman. To be

more particular still, a dress that was made for the one would have exactly fitted the other. But if in the height of stature and in the modelled forms of shape, there existed this similitude between the Minister's wife and Miss Marshall, the personal resemblance went no farther,—the former being of Spanish duskiness of complexion, with raven hair and large dark eyes. Unlike the Spanish women generally, however, this lady wore her hair in a profusion of ringlets and tresses, which admirably became the perfectly oval shape of her countenance. She was handsome,—with regular features, bright red lips, and a superb set of teeth: while the rich carnation blood appeared on the cheeks beneath the diaphanous olive tint of the skin. Altogether she was a lady whose beauty might be termed brilliant; and she was as commanding and gracefully majestic, as her husband in stature and appearance was insignificant and sinister-looking. There was however upon her countenance a certain air of pensive melancholy, which seemed to denote that she was not altogether happy in her mind; and notwithstanding the affability of her manner, this spirit of thoughtfulness—almost amounting to mournfulness—displayed itself in a certain degree of languor. Kate was immediately prepossessed in her favour: for she felt convinced that the wife was very different from the husband.

"Pardon this intrusion, madam," she said, thus addressing in her native English the Spanish lady: "but I have been emboldened to wait upon you in order to present a letter from the Marchioness of Villebelle."

"Ah! my English friend, the Marchioness—that sweet amiable creature!" said the Minister's wife, a smile appearing at once upon her lips; as if she heard with unfeigned pleasure the name of one whose acquaintance she valued. "Pray be seated; for whosoever comes with a letter of introduction from either the Marquis or the Marchioness of Villebelle, must be truly welcome here."

Kate presented the letter: and in so doing she sighed audibly, through fear that the present proceeding would prove useless, as all the incidents of her interview with the Minister swept vividly through her memory. The lady's ear caught that sigh; and fixing her large dark eyes intently upon Miss Marshall, she said in a low murmuring voice, but

ill speaking in the English language.
 "And you too are unhappy!"

Kate hastily averted her head to conceal her tears; and the Minister's wife, thinking that the letter would no doubt afford her some insight into the cause of that sorrow which her visitress had too evidently experienced, addressed herself to its perusal without saying another word.

"Miss Marshall," said the Spanish lady, when she had read the letter, "it is impossible for any one to appear before me more strongly recommended than yourself. To the extent of my limited power, you may command my services. Not merely on the ground of this recommendation will they be cheerfully afforded;—but likewise because you belong to a nation for whom I entertain an esteem amounting to an affection. I was educated for some years in England, and received the kindest treatment from every one with whom I came in contact. Delay not therefore to give me such explanations as may enable me to tell you at once to what extent you may reckon on my influence."

Kate Marshall's tale was soon told; but in speaking of the interview which had so recently passed between herself and the lady's husband, she did not of course allude to the infamous proposal he had made her—but merely stated that his Excellency had declined to grant her request.

"Profoundly grieved am I, Miss Marshall, to enhance your affliction," said the lady, speaking in a voice indicative of the most compassionate sympathy: "for it would be wrong on my part to encourage a hope the realization of which I cannot foresee—much less promise. You cannot disguise from yourself—I am sure you are too intelligent to make such an attempt—that the case of the unfortunate man in whom you are so deeply interested, is no ordinary one?"

"I know it—alas, I know it but too well, lady!" responded Kate, with profound mournfulness. "Indeed, I have been made to understand that it is so. But surely, surely, there is mercy to be shown even to one who has so grievously offended against the laws of your country as he?"

"Did my husband hold out no hope?" inquired the lady: "none?—not the slightest whatsoever?"

"None, madam," answered Kate: but

as she thus spoke, the colour mounted to her cheeks an instant before so pale; and if her own life had depended on it, she could not have prevented herself from looking troubled and confused—this trouble and this confusion, too, being enhanced when she perceived that the Minister's wife was now gazing upon her with a peculiar manner of penetration.

"And his Excellency hold out no hope?" said the lady, slowly emphasizing her words, and looking with keen earnestness at Kate, as if she did not altogether believe the response that had been given, and bade her tax her memory of something that lurked in the background.

"Madam, I entertain no hope at the hands of your husband," replied Miss Marshall; then feeling that her confusion and her trouble were augmenting, and consequently becoming all the more visible, she burst into tears, exclaiming passionately, "All my hope is now centred in yourself and in heaven!"

The minister's wife rose from her seat, with a certain expression of countenance that appeared to be almost anguished; and she turned abruptly aside: then, as suddenly accosting Kate again, she said in a low voice, "Miss Marshall you have not told me *all*! I understand it!—I comprehend the noble delicacy of your conduct—and I thank you!"

And this voice in which the Spanish lady spoke, was not merely low—it was likewise so altered from its natural tones that Kate was smitten with dismay; and gazing up into the countenance that was bent over her, as she herself retraced her own seat, saw that it was deadly pale—with that pallor, too, which is always the more ghastly and the more fearful when displayed by the face of a brunette. The idea naturally flashed all in a moment to Kate's mind, that the lady must be sufficiently aware of her husband's true character,—possibly acquainted, also, with a sufficiency of his antecedents,—to enable her to make the painful surmise of what had actually taken place. Her own uneasiness was therefore wrought up to the highest: her confusion was enhanced into bewilderment. She knew not what to say; her own position was most painful. If questioned pointedly, how could she deny what had taken place?—but on the other hand, how

could she admit it? To distress this kind-hearted lady who in the space of a few minutes had shown her so much sympathy, was an alternative to which she could not easily bring herself; and yet, as she still gazed on that fearfully pale countenance, and looked into those dark eyes where an unnatural light seemed burning,—she felt convinced that the injured and outraged wife had indeed but too well conjectured what had passed at the interview between herself and the Minister.

“Miss Marshall,” said the lady, resuming her seat, and making an evidently powerful endeavour to subdue her emotions, “you have not told me all; but I again thank you for having suppressed that which you have left unexplained. Ah! it was not without reason I involuntarily observed just now *that you too are unhappy*,—meaning thereby that in such unhappiness there was perhaps too much cause for the existence of sympathy between us.”

“Lady,” answered Kate, in a voice deeply compassionating this avowal of affliction on the part of the Minister’s wife,—“if for a moment my presence beneath this roof should have led to aught that has given you pain, most sincerely and deeply do I regret it. You have shown me so much kind sympathy—and sympathy to one in my position is so sweet—that not for worlds could I find it in my heart to be the source of annoyance. Let me go, madam!—I will take elsewhere the burden of my own sorrows —”

“Miss Marshall,” interrupted the Minister’s wife, “there is something savouring of reproachfulness in your tone, your look, and your manner. Ah! if a doubt had previously remained in my mind, it would now be cleared up. Yes it is indeed so! There is confirmation of my painful conjecture in every syllable you have uttered—in every glance you have flung upon me. Oh!” she cried, wringing her hands bitterly—but still she did not weep,—“what must you think of a man who wields so much power to do good, and yet uses it so unworthily? Oh, what must you think, I say?—what must you think? Alas that I should have been compelled to speak thus openly and plainly in your presence: but I see how it has been. You too have experienced an outrageous proposal from that man whose conduct fills me with shame, as it causes my unhappiness,—that man nevertheless whom I love so

devotedly and so well! Oh, if my dear friend Constance”—thus alluding to the Marchioness of Villebelle—“knew that I am unhappy, and suspected the cause ——But no!” she interrupted herself vehemently: “heaven forbid that I should be suspected at all—heaven in mercy forbid!”

The unfortunate lady became convulsed with grief—or rather desisted from her impassioned outpourings through the augmenting paroxysms of that rending anguish; and Kate Marshall, forgetting whatsoever difference of rank there might be between them, took both her hands—pressed them warmly in her own—and besought her to be comforted. The gush of mental agonies was too violent to last long; and when its sweeping fury had passed away—or at least had yielded somewhat to a lull—the Minister’s wife caressingly acknowledged the display of Miss Marshall’s sympathy; and after a brief pause went on speaking.

“Circumstances,” she said, “have led me into revelations to your ears which have never been breathed even to my mother or father—much less to friends or acquaintances. No: the pride of a woman has prevented *that*,—the pride of a Castilian too! Were I ill-looking, unaccomplished, and coarse in manners, I might complain of a husband’s neglect—because, in *that* case, I should not be sustained by a proper pride above the meanness of complaining. It is however different. My glass tells me that I am not ugly; a retrospect over the educational training through which I have passed, convinces me that I cannot altogether be devoid of mental attractions; and the adulation which I receive in society, forbids the notion that my manners are repulsive. Therefore have I the conviction that I am a woman to be loved: and for the same reason my pride prevents me from suffering the world to know that I have not the power of fascinating my husband’s heart. But I will tell you more, Miss Marshall. When four years ago I first formed his acquaintance, he was a poor, unknown, struggling advocate at the bar. We were married—and the dower which I brought him, though small, was nevertheless the foundation of his fortune. Therewith he established the journal which became such a power amongst the press—a power too amongst the people. It procured him a seat in the Chamber of Deputies; and thence the transition was by no means

difficult to the elevated post of a Minister. To me he owes everything: my recompense is—nothing! worse than nothing—it is neglect! For three years has our married life lasted: for two years we have occupied separate chambers;—yes, for two years we have been only as friends dwelling beneath the same roof. There has been as much alienation between us—or rather on *his* part towards *me*—as if no nuptial vows had ever been pronounced. It may seem singular to you, Miss Marshall, that within the first hour of our acquaintance, I tell you all this: but it is because circumstances have led me into the revelation—And besides,” added the Minister’s wife, suddenly looking as if she were ashamed and confused, “there is a project in my mind which may serve the purposes of us both.”

“Serve mine?” ejaculated Kate, eagerly catching, like a drowning creature, at any straw. “Do you mean that there is hope of saving the life of him I love?”

“Hope? Yes—every hope!” responded the lady. “But only if you will be guided by me.”

“Guided by you?” exclaimed Miss Marshall: “you are an angel sent to raise me up from despair! Oh, you have but to speak—to give me your instructions—to tell me what to do—and I will follow your counsel in all things.”

“Patience for a moment,” said the lady; “and let me first understand you beyond the possibility of mistake. Deal frankly with me: think not of wounding my feelings by any painful disclosures: it is absolutely necessary that I should learn everything which passed between my husband and yourself.

“Do you indeed insist upon such full and complete revelations?” asked Kate.

“I do,” responded the Minister’s wife. “Again I say, tell me everything! The success of the project which I have in my mind, depends upon the accuracy with which you give me these details. Alas! did you not perceive that I only conjectured them but too well almost from the beginning? You are not the first, Miss Marshall, to whom my husband has made such proposals: you are not the first to whom he has offered to sell that mercy which on no other condition would he vouchsafe! But you are one of the few who have had the honour, the spirit, and the rectitude to scorn and disdain the proposition. Oh! you know

not how I love my husband, notwithstanding all his faults: and if I could but wean him back to my arms— But I am wasting time. Pray give me your explanations.”

Kate Marshall,—perceiving that the Minister’s wife was firmly resolute in hearing these disclosures, and that they connected themselves with the plan she was revolving in her mind,—no longer hesitated to acquiesce in her demand. She accordingly entered upon a narrative of those particulars of her interview with the Minister which are already known to the reader: but inasmuch as she appeared disposed to glance at them more lightly than was consistent with minuteness of detail, in order to avoid as much as possible shocking the outraged wife,—the latter was compelled to question her closely to elicit the fullest particulars. Ultimately every tittle was revealed,—not even to the omission of the insolent prophecy thrown out by the Minister, to the effect that within the week which was passing Kate would return to him.

“Now I know all,” said the Minister’s wife, in a mournful voice: for she could not be otherwise than shocked at the cold-blooded cruelty and refined villany of her husband’s conduct: but speedily brightening up again, with the hope which was encouraged by the project then in her mind, she said, “Now, Miss Marshall, I will explain to you the course which is to be followed—the only course whereby you can save your love from an otherwise certain death!”

The Minister’s wife and Kate Marshall remained together for nearly an hour longer in deep and earnest discourse: but what the nature of it was, need not now be particularized. Suffice it to say, that Kate took her departure with hope in her bosom; and on returning to the hotel, she gave the landlady to understand that she had experienced no unfavourable reception at the hands of the Minister of the Interior and his wife—but that a definite answer could not be given to her prayer for three or four days to come.

CHAPTER CXLVI.

THE APPOINTMENT.

It was on the fourth morning after the interviews with the Minister and his wife,—and consequently verging towards the end of the week, within the limit of which it was so vitally necessary to adopt a decisive measure on behalf of Ned Russell,—that Kate Marshall again apparelled herself in her handsomest costume. She expended a considerable time over her toilet,—paying the minutest attention to every detail, and studying to render herself as attractive as possible. No doubt she felt that there was something meretricious in all this: but the image of her beloved was uppermost in her mind,—she was doing it for his sake—and this was her consolation. Her heart too beat high with hope; and this inward excitement gave a rich carnation bloom to her countenance. Never had Kate Marshall appeared to greater advantage: never had her handsome countenance looked handsomer—never were the rich contours of her shape more admirably displayed by the aids of apparel.

It was bordering upon noon, when having finished this careful toilet, Miss Marshall entered a hired vehicle, and was driven to the private dwelling of the Minister of the Interior. This house, as already intimated—and like many of the mansions at Madrid—had two entrances. One was considered the private means of access to the family compartment: the other communicated with the official rooms of the Minister himself: for we should have observed that although he transacted his principal business at the Ministry of the Interior, he nevertheless received, at a certain hour, applicants and visitors at his own private residence. Perhaps he had more motives than one in adopting this course: it might be that there were certain matters which he could conduct with greater privacy at his own abode than at the building officially devoted to the department over which he presided.

It was at the entrance to the Minister's apartments that the vehicle which bore Kate, stopped to set her down, as on the preceding occasion. She was conducted up to the waiting-room: several other persons were there assembled;—but almost immediately after her

arrival, she was desired by the usher to follow him into the Minister's presence. It was evident therefore that this usher had received his instructions how to act in case Miss Marshall should call again. The colour was heightened upon her cheeks as she followed the official into the same cabinet where she had before seen the Minister of the Interior; and on entering that apartment, she observed that he was now alone,—the secretary having been doubtless ordered to withdraw. The Minister endeavoured to maintain a cold reserve of manner,—as if he did not choose to show too much pleasure at the fulfilment of his prophecy. At the reappearance of Miss Marshall, nevertheless, the gradual flushing of his previously pale cheeks, and the fiercer burning of his dark eyes, denoted but too plainly the flaming-up of the devouring desires which her presence had on the former occasion excited within him. Bowing with a distant courtesy, he motioned Kate to a seat—and resumed his own, from which he had risen on her entrance.

"Your prophecy is fulfilled, sir," said Kate, speaking in a low but firm voice. "I am here once more."

"But have you been mindful of the warning I gave?" demanded the Minister, his eyes travelling slowly and with gloating eagerness over her entire form; "have you borne in mind the assurances I so emphatically held out, that it would be useless to have recourse anew to intercession and entreaty—to threat or upbraiding?"

"I have borne all this in mind," answered Kate, her looks sinking beneath the devouring gaze of the libertine Minister.

"Then I am to understand, Miss Marshall," he went on to say, "that you have consented to my proposition?"

"I am resolved to save at any price the life of him whom I love:"—and still Kate spoke in a low but firm tone.

"It is well—and your decision is a wise one," said the Minister, every feature of his countenance being expressive of the inward exultation that filled his heart. "Doubtless you reflected that the period of delay is drawing to a close—and that to-morrow,—or the day after to-morrow at latest, the order for your lover's pardon should be transmitted to the Captain General of Catalonia?"

"Such has been my reflection," rejoined Kate: "and to ensure the transmission of that pardon, have I returned to fulfil your prophecy."

"Then listen!" said the Minister, as he now approached Kate; and taking her hand, he bent towards her so that his breath, hot with the fever of desire, played upon her cheek. "This night, as the clocks proclaim the hour of ten, must you be with me. No one need mark your arrival: no one shall be nigh to observe your approach. I will give you the key of that door at the entrance—In short, everything shall be managed with a becoming delicacy."

"I expect as much at your hands, sir," answered Kate: "for heaven knows that if the shame and dishonour which I am this night to encounter, became whispered abroad in the world, it would drive me to despair and to self-destruction!"

"Fear nothing!" quickly answered the Minister, who was almost maddened by that close survey of Kate's countenance, —a survey which showed him that she was still in all the freshness of her charms—that no artificial colour lent the hue of the rose to her cheeks: while at the same time he could drink in the breath that was pure and balmy as the gentle breeze of a Spring morning. "Fear nothing," he repeated, "You have but to hint at any other arrangements—and they shall be adopted. All that I require is the faithful keeping of the appointment: I care not for the circumstances under which it may be kept, so long as you will be mine!"

"Can you not understand," asked Kate, averting her blushing countenance, "that henceforth I can never look you in the face again?—Already am I overcome with shame and confusion—"

"And wherefore, beloved one?" asked the Minister: and he endeavoured to imprint a kiss upon one of those glowing cheeks: but she quickly repulsed him, starting up from her seat at the same time.

"No! no!" she cried: "not now! not now! Have I not assured you that I am already overcome with shame? Spare me, I beseech you!"

"I will," he answered: "because to-night you will be mine—altogether mine! But you will not come cold and inanimate—coy and reluctant—to my arms? It must not be a marble statue that I am to enfold in my

embrace. No: you must come glowing with passion and with ardour——"

"Speak not thus—speak not thus!" interrupted Kate, trembling—perhaps shuddering from head to foot. "Oh, there is something shocking in the idea of talking thus in the broad daylight, when the sun is shining! But to-night when darkness shall be upon the face of the earth—and when in the midst of darkness also I shall meet you, —*then* it may be different: *then*, perhaps, the plunge being resolved upon, I shall more than resign myself to my fate——"

"Oh, I understand you—I understand you!" exclaimed the libidinous Minister, literally trembling with the ardour of his passion. "You will be all that I require? But what meant you by those words you have just spoken—*that in the midst of darkness we shall meet?*"

"I mean this," answered Kate, still speaking with averted looks, and with a countenance crimsoned up to the very hair of her head: "that inasmuch as I never again can look you in the face without dying of shame—and inasmuch as you have promised that whatsoever arrangement may be suggested to spare my feelings, shall be carried out—I have to stipulate that the only condition on which I will come, is to the effect that we *do* meet in darkness; and that for the hour which I shall remain with you, your Excellency swears as a man of honour—by everything sacred in heaven, and in fear of everything terrible in Satan's kingdom—that you will not attempt to kindle lamp nor candle for the purpose of looking me in the face."

"No, no: I will not do it!" answered the Minister. "I will obey your behest in all things."

"You swear?" demanded Kate.

"I swear," responded the Minister.

"You swear," she repeated, "as solemnly and as fearfully as I ere now indicated?"

"I swear by all my hopes of hereafter!" was the rejoinder vehemently given.

"And understand me well," continued Kate, still speaking with averted looks—and still too with cheeks of peony-redness,—*"there is something still more coercive than an oath——"*

"What mean you?" demanded the Spaniard hastily.

"I mean this," was the quick reply: "*that if you attempt to violate that*

oath which you have sworn, a dagger which I shall have with me——”

“A dagger?” ejaculated the Minister who was in his soul a coward.

“Yes—a dagger!” responded Kate.

“But not to drink your heart’s blood! I am no murderess—no, not even to avenge such an outrage as that would be! But inasmuch as, if after having surrendered my honour up to you, it would be a shame goading me to madness to look you in the face—and as death would be preferable to such shame.—that dagger which is to accompany me, shall be plunged deep down into my own bosom if you were to attempt to violate your oath. *Then* your Excellency would have to account to the world as best you could, for the tragedy thus occurring in the privacy of your own chamber.”

“Fear not, beauteous creature,” responded the Minister, “that there will be need for such a frightful catastrophe. No, no: my imagination will depict the loveliness of your countenance, as it is already impressed upon my memory. Be it therefore as you say: we will meet in the darkness—we will continue in darkness—we will part in darkness likewise.”

“And the decree of pardon,” added Kate, “will be already drawn up—your signature will be attached thereto? You will have the document in readiness for me this night?”

“Fear not! all shall be done as you wish,” replied the Spaniard.

“And now, one word more!” continued Kate: “for all this has a business-like regularity that must not be lost sight of. Your Excellency perceives that I trust entirely to your honour in faithfully placing in my hands the pardon for which I am to make so great a sacrifice. There is in our English history a terrible tale, of a certain Colonel Kirke, who obtained possession of a young damsel’s virtue under circumstances somewhat similar to these which are taking place now,—with this difference, however, that it was the girl’s brother, and not her lover, for whom she sacrificed herself to that pitiless soldier-judge. It is however recorded that Kirke—a vile traitor to his pledge, and inspired with the cruelty of a fiend—opened his casement in the morning, and showed the dishonoured sister the corpse of her brother suspended to a tree at a little distance. Now, your Excellency must understand me well——”

“What! do you believe me capable of such diabolic perfidy as that?” ejaculated the Minister.

“I have a right to guard against it,” responded Kate, calmly and firmly. “Give me now a written acknowledgment signed by your own hand—sealed with your own seal,—an acknowledgment which I shall bear away with me,—that on certain conditions to be fulfilled to-night, the full and complete pardon of Edward Russell is to be placed in my possession. To-morrow I will remit you, by messenger or post, the acknowledgment you are about to sign.”

“Ah! but you will use it to wreak a vengeance upon me?” cried the Minister, almost astounded at the demand.

“Think you that if I gain my end—namely, the salvation of my lover,” asked Kate,—“I shall be willing to take a step which by giving publicity to the whole dread and infamous transaction, would make known my shame to the world? No, sir: I should be but too anxious for the secret to be religiously kept. But if, on the other hand, you deceive me in respect to the pardon—*then* should I scatter all the other considerations to the wind; and the idea of vengeance becoming paramount, I should proclaim all my wrongs—because when once that vengeance had been wreaked, I myself should have no longer a single tie to bind me to existence. I should perish—and in self-destruction throw off the coil of shame!”

The Minister of the Interior perceived nothing unreasonable in all this: on the contrary, he merely beheld therein the natural precaution which a woman was likely to take when having to deal with a person of unscrupulous character. For his Excellency knew full well that such *was* his character—and that in such a light it must be viewed by Miss Marshall. But on this score he was altogether indifferent; he considered himself to have risen by his own talents and intrigues high above the opinion of the world at large—and consequently to place him in total independence of the opinion of an individual. He was infatuated with Miss Marshall’s beauty:—possessed of the strongest passions, he was excited to a more than ordinary degree by her handsome countenance and her fine shape: he longed to clasp her in his arms—yearned with avidity to make her his own. Therefore it was without any farther hesitation

that he yielded to what he regarded as a mere precaution on her part; and seating himself at the desk, he penned in the English language precisely such a document as she had suggested,—appending his signature, and affixing the ministerial seal of the Home Department.

"One single embrace ere you leave me, Miss Marshall!" he said as she presented the paper: and he made a movement to suit the action to the word.

"No, sir—not now!" she emphatically exclaimed, retreating a couple of paces. "I am no brazen face that can thus calmly and deliberately surrender myself to the arms of a stranger. Understand me well, sir!" she continued, again with averted countenance, and with that crimsoning of the cheeks which showed how revolting it was unto the sensitive delicacy of her feelings to be compelled thus to argue and expatiate upon such a subject: "understand me well, sir! I am pure and chaste: it is no meretricious female whom you are thus wooing by coercion instead of by sentiment; and again do I repeat that in the broad daylight, with the sun shining, I cannot look you in the face and think of all that is to be consummated. This night, punctually as the clocks at Madrid proclaim the hour of ten, shall I keep the appointment which has been made."

With these words Kate Marshall, having secured the document in her bosom, moved towards the door; and the Minister of the Interior sought not to detain her—sought not even so much as to touch her hand again. That door closed behind her; and when he was once more alone, he gloated over the idea that within a few hours thence, the superb creature who had just quitted his presence, would be his own—abandoned completely unto him—clasped in his arms!

Kate returned to the hotel; and in the course of the afternoon, a lady—wearing the graceful Spanish mantilla, which completely concealed her countenance—called upon her at that hostelry. They were closeted together for rarely an hour; and then the visitress took her leave,—departing on foot as she had come, and with the mantilla completely hiding her features, so that she could not possibly be recognised by any one belonged to the establishment.

This lady was the wife of the Minister of the Interior: but wherefore had she thus stealthily sought an interview with Kate? This question will be speedily answered by the incidents which we are about to record.

The hours passed—evening came—the dusk set in—and at length the iron tongue of Time proclaimed the moment of the appointment which Miss Marshall had consented to keep with the Minister of the Interior. This functionary had given an intimation to his domestics that they were to be out of the way so far as his own private suite of apartments was concerned; and they, comprehending full well that their master had in hand one of his wonted affairs of gallantry, took the hint and were careful to obey it. Faithful to his promise to Kate Marshall, he extinguished the lights in the vestibule—on the staircase—in the spacious landing to which that staircase led,—everywhere, in short, from the entrance-door to that his own chamber: and within the chamber itself likewise. He was apparelled in a dressing gown—his feet were thrust into slippers: his heart was beating with the excitement of his passions—for his fervid imagination was enabled to define and delineate all the contours of that shape which the dress of his intended victim had concealed, although to a certain extent developing them. He thought to himself that the moment was now at hand which was to give him one of those rewards for which he had laboured, and toiled, and intrigued: inasmuch as he regarded the possession of power, not merely as a crowning triumph of his ambition, but likewise as the means of gratifying his insatiate lust for pleasure.

It was, as we have said, ten o'clock—and already for at least five minutes had the licentious Minister been waiting in the vestibule,—waiting there in the darkness for the arrival of her whom he expected. Nor was he kept long in suspense. The bell at the entrance rang: he flew to open the door—and a female form, closely veiled, passed into the vestibule.

"Beauteous creature, I thank thee," exclaimed the impassioned Minister, "for thus punctually keeping the appointment of love!—and now feeling that he had a right to consider her his own, shrouded in the darkness as they were, and all arrangements being made by

him in faithful compliance with Kate Marshall's stipulations,—he tore up the veil, and straining her in his arms, pressed his lips to her's. "Now," he said, "led me lead you hence."

She had spoken not a word: she appeared to have surrendered herself like a willing victim to his embrace. She accompanied him up the stairs; the landing was crossed—the chamber was entered.

For obvious reasons we must pass with some degree of haste over this scene. Suffice it to say that half-an-hour had elapsed from the moment that the Minister of the Interior had conducted the female to his chamber,—when he exclaimed, in the English tongue, "By heaven, there is some mystery in all this! You answer my impassioned language in monosyllables—and these lowly murmured! A suspicion—yes, a suspicion has flashed to my mind——No! it has been growing and growing for some minutes past—now it is confirmed——By heaven, I will be satisfied!"

"Remember your solemn pledge, sir," whispered a female voice, in the darkness of that chamber, and also speaking in English,—“there is to be no light!”

"Ah, this voice!" ejaculated the Minister, full of wildering astonishment and affright: "it is not that of her whom I expected—though feigned, I know that it is not! It has not her accents—I am deceived——But, by the living God, I will clear up the mystery!"

"Remember, sir—the dagger——"

"Away with all considerations!" cried the almost infuriate man. "At any risk——"

"Then the consequences be upon your own head," again murmured that female voice. "It is I who promised to meet you—it is I who have abandoned myself to you—Give me the pardon, and suffer me to depart!"

The Minister had remained perfectly still, and listening breathlessly to her words as she thus spoke: for he sought, with all the keenness of the sense of hearing, to discover whether it were really Kate Marshall's voice or another.

"No, no—I am deceived!" he ejaculated, now speaking in his own native tongue. "There is something startling in all this!"

He rushed to the chimney-piece, where there were materials ready for striking a light. His female companion endeavoured not to prevent him from using those materials: she doubtless thought that such an attempt would be vain, and

might only lead to the exercise of violence towards herself, and to the disturbance of the household. Therefore in a few moments a light sprang into existence in the room: but not more quickly blazed up that flame, than did the eyes of the Minister glance upon the female—and he beheld his own wife!

"Madam," he said, becoming composed and calm all in a moment, and speaking in a cold stern voice,—“I will not pretend to declare that you are not justified in the course you have pursued. But on *my* side I have now only one alternative to adopt.”

Thus speaking, he took from a side-table a sealed packet, containing the pardon of Edward Russell; and deliberately tearing it in halves, he set fire to it by the wax-candle which he had lighted. He watched the fragments until they were consumed: the baffled, disappointed, and even humiliated wife watched them also. Then, as the last sparks were expiring one after the other on the blackened tinder, the unhappy lady heaved a profound sigh; and tears trickled down her cheeks as she thought of what would now be the feelings of poor Kate Marshall. But as a recollection suddenly flashed to her mind, she accosted her husband; and looking him with earnest significance in the countenance, said, "Miss Marshall has an acknowledgment signed by your own hand—sealed with the Ministerial signature—to the effect that the pardon of Edward Russell is to be presented to her!"

"On certain conditions," responded the Minister, coldly,—“which have not been fulfilled.”

"But that acknowledgment," quickly exclaimed his wife, "will prove your ruin! it will serve as the corroboration of the tale which she will tell——"

"No," interrupted the Minister; "it will have none of these effects:"—and he pulled the cord of the bell with some degree of violence.

"What would you do? what intention have you?" demanded his wife, seized with consternation.

"Listen to the orders I shall give," rejoined her husband, still in that same cold, stern, implacable voice; "and you will hear."

The bell which he had just pulled rang in the chamber of a valet who slept overhead. Scarcely had the Minister given that response to his

wife, when a knock was heard at the door of the apartment; and the Minister, partly opening the door, addressed his valet thus:—

"Hasten and take with you a sufficient number of the police for the arrest of a woman,—this woman being a resolute and determined one. Lose no time in repairing to the hotel where she resides;"—and he named it, "let no mercy be shown her! let no delay take place! See that she communicates not with a single individual belonging to the establishment. It is of equal importance that all papers in her possession should be secured on the spot—sealed up—and brought to me. Let every nook and corner—every possible crevice of concealment—be thoroughly searched and examined: for this is a dangerous woman—a spy in the pay of the Chartists—and she has important documents with her. Her name is Catherine Marshall England is her native country. Now depart;—and at the expiration of an hour at the farthest, I shall expect that you knock at this door to announce that the arrest is effected, and to place in my hands the sealed packet containing all the papers found in the woman's room. Stop!—one word more! When conveyed to gaol, let her be placed in a cell by her self; and see that some trustworthy individual be appointed as the turnkey."

Having issued these instructions, the Minister of the Interior abruptly closed the door of the chamber; and as his eyes again settled upon his wife, he saw that she was pale, trembling—the picture of grief and despair.

"For heaven's sake, consummate not this stupendous injustice!" cried the unhappy lady, flinging herself at the Minister's feet. "Oh, do not. I implore you! Avenge not upon her whatsoever rancour you may cherish against me! It was I who devised the project—it was I who counselled her how to act——"

"How came you to form her acquaintance?" demanded the husband, folding his arms across his chest, and looking down in cold severity upon that wife who still knelt at his feet, and whom he bade not arise from her suppliant posture.

"She brought me a letter from the Marchioness de Villebelle. That letter I can show you. It was on the same day when she had a first interview with you—Oh! in mercy spare her! Send and revoke the order ere it be

too late! I will pledge my existence that no evil use shall be made of the written promise you have given;—in mercy spare her, I conjure you!" and the unhappy lady extended her clasped hands in entreated, solemnly towards her husband.

But cold and pitiless, he continued to gaze down upon her; he was moved not by her beauty nor her tears: he seemed not to reflect that in punishment for the monstrous injustice he had done towards her who was his wife, he was bound to confer any boon which she might demand. There, in semi-undress, she knelt; there, clad only in the lightest drapery, was she a suppliant at his feet—and he still remorseless and implacable!

"But wherefore," he demanded, "did you leave several days to elapse ere this project of yours, to which you became an accomplice, was put into execution?"

"Oh, because it was deemed more prudent to allow that interval to pass, so that it might appear as if she procrastinated the dread alternative until almost the latest moment——"

"I understand," interrupted the Minister, a scornful smile appearing upon his lips. "It was indeed a stratagem altogether well worthy of woman's ingenuity—a stratagem whereby two purposes were to be served:—she to obtain the pardon of her lover—you to win back a neglectful husband to your arms. And pray, madam, was it your intent to keep this secret all to yourself?"

"No," she answered, suddenly rising to her feet, and assuming a firmer look, "To-morrow, after having placed the pardon in the young woman's hands, I should have come to you—I should have thrown myself at your feet, where I have now been so vainly kneeling—I should have confessed everything—I should have besought you to take compassion upon me, and to consider that the course I had adopted was not merely to save a virtuous and unhappy foreigner from the chance of succumbing to a foul wrong as the only alternative of rescuing her lover,—but likewise as a proof of the affection, undiminished and undying, which I entertain for you! Oh, will you not be merciful?—do what you will with me, but spare that unhappy creature?"

"It is impossible," responded the husband: "the order has gone forth—it is too late! And now, madam," he

added, with another scornful smile, "since you have thus contrived to obtain access to my chamber, it suits me that you should remain here for the present,—inasmuch as I will not conceal from you my apprehension that if left at liberty, you would speed to the hotel in the hope of anticipating the visit of the police."

"And is it thus that you address your own wife?" exclaimed the wretched lady: then, as her eyes suddenly flashed fire, and her form appeared to dilate with the inspiration of indignant pride, she exclaimed, "But enough of this humiliation for me! You have committed the foulest outrage which a husband can perpetrate towards a wife: you stand before me under circumstances which render your proposed infidelity undeniable;—and not one word of regret—not one syllable of remorse has passed your lips! You take the highest ground—that ground which I myself ought to occupy!—you treat me as if I were the offender,—whereas it is you yourself who are the criminal! But I will bear patiently with my wrongs no more. Have you forgotten, sir, that Spanish blood flows in my veins—that a true Castilian vengeance can animate my soul?"

"Madam," answered the Minister coldly, "if you think that you have it in your power to ruin me, make the attempt. If it succeed, you pull down an edifice over your own head as well as over mine: if you fail, you will only widen the distance which of late has subsisted between us."

The unhappy lady saw but too keenly and felt but too forcibly the truth of these observations; and flinging herself upon the couch, she gave way to a passionate outburst of grief.

At the expiration of the hour, there was a knock at the door of that chamber; and the Minister hastened to receive the tidings which his valet brought. He passed out upon the landing; and the unfortunate lady heard the domestic speak thus:—

"Your Excellency's commands are obeyed to the very letter: the English woman, bearing the name of Catherine Marshall, is in prison—and this packet contains the few papers—which were found in her possession."

"Good!" responded the Minister: and re-entering the chamber, he closed the door.

Then, tearing open the pocket, he examined the papers one after the

other: but his looks altered visibly at the keen watching eye of his wife, who he found that the written promise given to Kate Marshall, was not amongst them. This was an event for which he was but little prepared: he had felt confident that acknowledgment would be amongst those documents—but it was not! The cause was dangerous—critical: that acknowledgment was in his own signature—and was invested with all the formal sanctity which the Ministerial seal could bestow.

"You perceive," said his wife, more in anguish than reproach, "that you have woven a web which is closing around you—alas, I fear to your utter ruin!"

The Minister gave no immediate response—but stood gazing upon the paper with looks of sombre moodiness. His wife continued to watch his countenance with painful anxiety: she knew that the circumstances must be perilous and threatening indeed, when they could make this deep impression upon such a man as her husband.

"You can save me!" he suddenly exclaimed approaching the couch on which she reclined, her arm supporting his head.

"Oh, if I could!" she cried, with an expression of joy, and hope, and love appearing upon her features: "it would be the happiest moment of my life—because perhaps you would in that case give me back some portion of your heart?"

"Yes," quickly responded her husband, whose soul, indurated though it were, was touched by all these evidences of that truly noble-minded woman's devoted attachment, and who could not help feeling that this prompt anxiety on her part to succour him in his embarrassment, was far more than he deserved after all the abominable infamy of his conduct:—"Yes, I have indeed treated you too harshly! I were the veriest wretch upon earth if I did not appreciate so much goodness!"—then in a voice rendered tremulous with the conflicting emotions which such a variety of circumstances had excited with him he went on to say, "I cannot blind myself to the fact—I do not hesitate to admit—that I stand upon the very verge of ruin. Ah, cursed folly that has brought me to this extremity!"

"My dearest husband," said the noble-hearted Spanish woman, seized

his hands and pressing them to her bosom, "tell me what I can do to serve you."

"I am about to ask you much," quickly responded the Minister. But then, as a sudden thought struck him, he exclaimed, "Oh! you must know what Miss Marshall has done with that document? She acted under your advice——"

"Think you," interrupted the lady with a reproachful look, "that I should have left you thus in suspense, had I really known how she has disposed of the paper? No—on my soul, I am ignorant on the subject! I saw her this afternoon; and she acquainted me with all that had taken place between herself and you in the morning: she even showed me that paper—But I neither counselled her to make any special use of it, nor did she intimate that such was her intention. So far from myself having the knowledge that she thought of parting with it, it was a portion of my plan to obtain it from her on the morrow, when placing the pardon in her hands; and I should have come, as I ere now said, to throw myself at your feet—to reveal everything—and to restore to you this very written promise whereof we are speaking."

The lady spoke with such a voice and with such looks of completest sincerity, that it was impossible for her husband to doubt the truth of her averments.

"I believe you," he said: "what right indeed have I to doubt you—you who are exhibiting a kindness and an affection towards me which I so little deserve!"

"And the service I can render you?" asked the wife anxiously. "Methinks I can anticipate what you would say."

"At an early hour in the morning," responded the Minister, "you must repair——"

"This night!—now, if you will!" exclaimed the lady. "I know what you mean: you would have me visit Miss Marshall in her prison——But, Ah! my dear husband, you have still the power to make some atonement—and rest assured you will not be a loser thereby! Sign the order for this young woman's release; let me be the bearer of it to the gaol—and I stake my existence upon the promise I now make,—which is, that I will have you

if it be yet possible to recall whatsoever course Miss Marshall may have taken!"

It was still more impossible than at first for the Minister to remain insensible to the generous conduct of his wife. That heart, which for nearly two years had remained so hardened against her, was melted. He would have been the vilest, the most detestable, and the most brutal of wretches were he otherwise; but unprincipled though he were, he was not so bad as all this. He seized his wife's hand—he carried it to his lips—and as she wound her arms about his neck, he clasped her to his breast.

"Admirable woman!" he exclaimed, "you have taught me a lesson this night which I cannot possibly forget! Whatsoever may be the result of these threatening circumstances, I shall not remain unmindful of your noble generosity. No—I shall not! Wicked and unscrupulous I have been! Not for an instant do I attempt to palliate my conduct: but I may atone for it—yes, I may atone for it; and that atonement shall be made. I will now follow your advice in all things. You say that you will proceed this night——"

"To the prison?" exclaimed the lady. "Yes—at once! Lose not a moment in writing order for the discharge of Miss Marshall: within an hour or two she may be back at the hotel—and the circumstance need not obtain publicity."

While thus speaking, the Minister's wife had begun to re-apparel herself hastily; and he, taking writing materials which were in the room, sat down and penned the document wherewith she had enjoined him to entrust her.

"But is not Miss Marshall herself," he suddenly asked, "playing you false—I mean by the disposal of that written promise without your knowledge——"

"Let us not judge her hastily," interrupted the lady. "She may have secured it in some place where it has escaped the notice of the searchers. This is indeed most probable: for brief as my acquaintance has been with her, I have nevertheless obtained a sufficient insight into her disposition to feel assured that she would do naught to injure you, the effects of which should redound upon myself. I am now about to issue forth: I will repair to the prison——But you empower me to promise Miss Marshall that her lover's pardon shall be forwarded to her in the morning?"

"The matter is in your hands," answered the Minister: "use your own discretion—adopt the course which may appear best. Fear not that I shall repudiate your actions!"

He again embraced his wife; and drawing her veil closely over her countenance, the magnanimous lady issued forth into the streets of Madrid,

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE GAOL.

It was soon after eleven o'clock on the eventful night of which we are speaking, that Kate Marshall's chamber at the hotel was suddenly invaded by the Minister's valet, followed by three officers of the Secret Police in plain clothes. Kate had not retired to rest; nor indeed had she even begun to disapparel herself. Her mind was too much agitated with suspense as to the issue of the stratagem, to permit her to seek her pillow. She was therefore sitting up,—endeavouring to concentrate her attention upon one of the books which she had brought with her from Dover: but she constantly lost the thread of what she attempted to read; and found her thoughts wandering to far different subjects. Although in respect to the written promise received from the Minister of the Interior, she had adopted a particular course—yet she could not satisfy herself that even this precaution would guard against the effects of his anger or the inciduousness of his treachery, should he discover that instead of the victim whom he expected, it was his own wife whom he was clasping in his arms. Thus, when the chamber was abruptly invaded by the valet and the policemen, Kate comprehended but too well that the stratagem was detected; and she was naturally smitten with the fear that all was lost. No—not quite *all*: for still there was the chance that some good might result from the manner in which she had disposed of the acknowledgment; and this idea was faintly—but only faintly—cheering for Miss Marshall.

The reader has seen enough of her to be aware that she was by no means deficient in courage; and though the shock produced by the sudden entry of those four men at this time of the night, was naturally great, she speedily

recovered her presence of mind, was however subjected to the gross and most indelicate treatment on part of the ruffians who now held captive. They insisted upon searching with their own hands the pockets of garments; and while two of the off-forcibly held her arms, the valet actually plunged his hand into her bosom to ascertain if she had any papers concealed there. Crimson with indignation, her eyes flashing fire, Kate Mars with an almost preterhuman effort digaged herself from the gripe of the ruffians; and snatching up one of the candlesticks, hurled it with such force at the insolent valet, that if it struck him on the head, he never would perhaps have had another chance of practising such dastard conduct in this world: but he stepped nimbly aside, and it fell at the far extremity of the room. Her trunk was then minutely searched—her garments were tossed out upon the floor; the inspection was most minute—but all that the ruffians could discover consisted of a few of Ned Russell's letters which he had written to her at different times, and which she had brought with her for re-perusal;—because what young woman who loves is ever unaccompanied by the tender epistles of him to whom her heart is devoted? The search was extended to the bed in the chamber—to the drawers—indeed to every nook where any thing might be concealed: but nothing more was discovered, beyond the letter referred to. These were duly sealed up, and taken possession of by the valet, in accordance with the positive instructions he had received from his master.

While the search was being prosecuted, Kate Marshall stood looking on with indignation still depicted upon her countenance; but she spoke not a word—because she was unable to make herself understood by the Spaniards; and even if it were otherwise, she was too full of wrathful pride and a sense of outraged modesty to design even a syllable of remonstrance or rebuke in respect to such brutal ruffians. When the search was over they made her a sign to put on her bonnet and shawl, and this being done, she was hurried down stairs to a vehicle waiting at the entrance of the hotel. She encountered not a soul belonging to the

establishment; not even the kind-hearted landlady was nigh to bestow upon her a look of compassion; and therefore Kate full well understood that the exclusion of the inmates of the hotel in their own chambers, while all these things were taking place, must be in pursuance of a strict mandate issued by the police officials to that effect. She likewise comprehended that she was being borne to gaol; for whither else could she be thus dragged away at that time of the night?

And it was so. In a quarter of an hour the vehicle reached the gate of the gloomy prison; and when the officials thereof were summoned, the valet gave whispered instructions relative to the consignment of Miss Marshall to a solitary cell. In a few minutes she was alone in that dungeon for all the appearance of a dungeon had it, though not underground. It was a small chamber, surrounded with walls of massive masonry but too well calculated to beat back any cries of anguish which might issue from the lips of a captive imprisoned there. There was no window in those walls; and the air was only admitted by a narrow grating in the huge door. An iron bedstead, with mean and sordid bedding—a table, a chair, a basin and ewer, these constituted the furniture of the place. The turnkey, who conducted Miss Marshall thither, took away the light,—locking and bolting the door behind him; and thus was she left in the depth of darkness and to the companionship of her own sad thoughts.

Still her presence of mind did not forsake her. Arbitrary as was the treatment to which she thus found herself subjected, yet she knew full well that even in a country where such things could be done, this same tyrannous power might not be stretched to such a length as to take her life secretly—nor publicly without some form of trial. She likewise reflected that the wife of the Minister of the Interior would most probably seek some means of befriending her; and she moreover knew that the course she had adopted in respect to the Minister's written undertaking, would be certain to lead to inquiries concerning her. Thus, altogether she was not without some slight consolation; but still she deeply felt the cruel treatment she was experiencing—while upon her cheeks still burnt the glow of indignation on account of the brutality of the Minister's valet.

For more than an hour she remained seated in the chair, giving way to her thoughts—until then, when, at length, off her apparitionary dress came the end. She did not visit any more, and she even wore the shawl, and a blanket for shawl. Nearly twelve hours passed, and it was very early in the morning, when she heard footsteps advancing along the stone corridor leading to her cell. A light streamed through the grating in the door, the key turned in the lock, and the bolts were withdrawn. Suddenly a white towel seized upon Kate Marshall, who if the unscrupulous and remorseless Minister had caused her to be brought thither, what he might by force accomplish, his dog and he purpose? what if the grating, sometimes belonging to that wall, would work at the atrocious contrived by one so highly placed and who wielded such power either to reward or to punish? Kate started up from the wretched pallet; and the grindloathing turnkey entered with a candle, which he placed upon the table. But who was it that followed him into that cell? to whom was it that he bowed with such profound respect, while standing aside for this person to enter? It was a female, closely veiled; but by her form and stature Kate knew her at once—it was the Minister's wife!

The turnkey withdrew, merely closing but not bolting nor locking the door behind him; the lady threw up her veil—and the next moment she and Kate were clasped in each other's arms.

"I come to save you—I come to deliver you, Miss Marshall!" said the Minister's wife. "I tell you this at once without making it a condition for the information I seek. I would not insult you so unwarrantably as to adopt such a course—"

"Ah, my dear madam!" exclaimed Kate, joy and gratitude beaming upon her countenance; "I felt assured you would not desert me—but I did not expect to receive so soon the proof of your friendship."

"It's afforded so soon as I could possibly show it," responded the lady. "You can but too well conjecture that my project failed—that all was discovered; but you will rejoice for my sake to learn that the incidents of this night have made so powerful an impression upon my husband, he has suddenly become an altered man! The proofs he

has given of this state of feeling are most important for me both. To me he has promised amendment; and a return of his love to you demands immediate freedom and the pardon of your intended husband."

Kate fell upon her knees, as prone with joy; and conveying the hand of the Minister's wife to her lips, she kissed it with her kisses and her tears. The lady who brought this quivering intelligence, likewise wept. It was a touching scene—full of an angelic pathos—as the Minister's wife, compelling Kate Marshall to rise, once more strained her in her arms.

"I cannot regret," said the lady, "anything that has taken place, inasmuch as I feel assured it has given me back a husband—and that husband an altered and better man."

"To you, dear lady," answered Kate, smiling through her tears, "is the gratitude of all the rest of my existence due—not only my gratitude, but that of him whose life is saved through your kindness. Ah! now I bethink me—you spoke of certain information which you required; and I am at no loss to conjecture what it is. My papers were seized with the idea that your husband's written undertaking would be found amongst them; and it was not. No—I sent it away for a certain purpose, which I will explain—but fear not, dear lady—it will fall into the hands of a kind friend of mine; and no use will be made of it prejudicial to your husband's interests."

"Thanks—a thousand thanks for that assurance," answered the Minister's wife: "you have relieved my mind from an immense load. For although I felt confident you would do nothing that should in any way violate the compact which was made between us to the effect that if your aims were accomplished through my agency, you would spare my husband from the chance of exposure—nevertheless I feared that it might be possible for that document to fall into other hands less scrupulous and less generous than your own."

"Listen, dear lady," answered Kate, "while I give you a few words of explanation. I have already spoken to you of that Count Christoval from whom I have received so much kindness, and through whose intervention the Captain General of Catalonia suspended the extreme sentence of the law. The count,

as you are aware, was anxious of Baron de Sade to continue his generous services with the best of his voice and hand. There should be long interviews of his count. When you left me at the hotel this afternoon, I was about to give him this letter of Count Christoval, but he knew that some of which was going on, but merely to give him understanding also within a few hours to question me. He asked, which I answered, that I could spare you, as my first intention was I took up my pen to write myself to a vague or simple statement. But as I began to write, other reflections entered my mind. What if your exigencies should altogether fail; what if the Minister exercising those terrible powers which he had threatened me should have seized upon even in the dead of night—hurried out of Spain—and on upon the Portuguese or French frontier I contemplated at this thought; and the too by natural association, it occurred to me that the same agents of the arbitrary power might wrest from me the written document which I held;—and that document was the only means by which, under any circumstances, could retain a hold over your husband!"

"I understand," observed the Minister's wife; "it was indeed most natural that these reflections should force themselves upon you. But proceed: for, and in haste to conduct you away from this horrible place!"—and the lady threw her shuddering look around the massive walls of the cell.

"Having reflected in that manner," resumed Kate, "I deeply deplored that I had not consulted you on this subject; but these ideas had not entered my head previous to your departure—and when you were gone, I did not dare seek you at your own abode, for fear that his Excellency might observe me. I therefore thought to myself that it was absolutely necessary to secure the document by some means or another—and to dispose of it in such a way that it might serve for eventual good, in case all other circumstances became adverse. I accordingly wrote the fullest details to Don Christoval,—enclosing that document in the letter. I enjoined him the strictest secrecy, should it ultimately prove unnecessary to make use of the paper;—and he is a man of honour, madam—he

will not deviate one tittle from the injunctions I gave nor from the course that I laid down for him to follow. I argued to myself that it was scarcely a breach of the compact made between yourself and me to adopt this course inasmuch as by your own counsel I obtained that undertaking from your husband."

"Not for a moment," responded the Minister's wife, "do I consider it a breach of the compact. Yes, I counselled you to obtain that undertaking so as to ensure the granting of the pardon by my husband: and you did well to adopt the precaution which you are describing."

"My narrative will be terminated in a few minutes," resumed Kate. "Recollecting how his Excellency had threatened to avail himself of his power to intercept my correspondence at the Post-office, I deemed that medium of conveyance to be an unsafe one for the transmission of my letter to Don Christoval. I accordingly despatched it by a mounted courier, who took his departure for Barcelona at about five o'clock this evening."

"And what course," inquired the lady, "did you instruct Count Christoval to adopt?"

"I requested his lordship to take no step for eighteen hours after the receipt of my despatch: but if at the expiration of that time he received not a second despatch from me, he was *then* to conclude that circumstances were adverse—that I was no longer the mistress of my own actions—that I was either in a prison or else being hurried out of Spain——"

"And in that case?" inquired the Minister's wife anxiously.

"In that case," responded Miss Marshall, "I implored and entreated that his lordship would lose not a moment in taking horse—speeding to Madrid—calling on your husband—and making such use of my written narrative, corroborated as it was by that undertaking, as under all circumstances he might think fit."

"Then no harm is done which may not be repaired!" exclaimed the lady, in a joyful tone. "You have conducted all these proceedings, my dear Miss Marshall, with a most delicate consideration towards myself, and with far more consideration than my husband deserved at your hands. But come—let us hasten away from this dreadful place."

Kate did not require to be told twice to put on her bonnet and shawl: the turnkey was waiting at the end of the passage—and as the door of the cell opened, he hastened forward to take the light and guide the two females forth. In a few minutes they stood in the open street: and Kate breathed the air of freedom once more just as the prison clock was proclaiming the hour of three in the morning. The hotel where she lodged, lay in the same direction as that which the Minister's wife had to take; and therefore they proceeded together. Had it been otherwise, the magnanimous lady would have all the same felt it her duty to see Miss Marshall safe to her own residence.

"You will now snatch a few hours of that repose which must be so necessary," said the lady to Kate, when they reached the door of the hotel. "By ten o'clock I shall again be with you, the bearer of Edward Russell's pardon: and you will then lose no time in despatching another courier with the precious document to Count Christoval at Barcelona."

The Minister's wife bade Kate a temporary farewell; and the house porter speedily answering her summons at the gate, she obtained admission into the hotel. Seeking her own chamber, she lost no time in retiring to rest: and well-nigh exhausted both in mind and body, she soon fell into a profound slumber.

When she awoke, it was nine o'clock; and the good-hearted landlady was standing by the side of the couch,—infinitely rejoiced to have heard that her guest had come back in the middle of the night, and to find that the intelligence given to her by the house-porter to this effect was indeed true. But inasmuch as the landlady had been kept in ignorance of all those transactions which were going on in respect to the Minister, his wife, and the stratagem devised by the latter,—the worthy woman could not conceive how it was possible Kate had been arrested as a Carlist Spy—an allegation which she herself had not for an instant believed. She accordingly said that she supposed it had been all a mistake on the part of the police?—and Kate, not wishing to be led into farther explanations, readily assured the landlady that such was the case.

At ten o'clock, faithful to her promise, the Minister's wife—again

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as you are aware, still remains at Barcelona, in order to continue his gene services until the best or the worst being known, there should no longer exist a need for them. When you came to the hotel this afternoon, I went down to pen a few lines to Count Christoval,—not to make him aware of what was going on, but merely to give him to understand that within a few hours a question would be decided whether Edward Russell was to be pardoned or not. It was, I can assure you, my first intention when I took up my pen thus to confine myself to a vague simple statement. But as I began to write, other reflections entered my mind. What if your stratagem should altogether fail? what if the Minister exercising those terrific powers with which he had threatened me, should have me seized upon, even in the dead of night—hurried out of Spain—and committed upon the Portuguese or French frontier? I shuddered at the thought; and then, too, by natural association, it occurred to me that the same agents of arbitrary power might wrest from me the written document which I held, and that document was the only means by which, under any circumstances, I could retain a hold over your husband."

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When she awoke, it was nine o'clock; and the good-hearted landlady was standing by the side of the couch,—infinitely rejoiced to have heard that her guest had come back in the middle of the night, and to find that the intelligence given to her by the house-porter to this effect was indeed true. But inasmuch as the landlady had been kept in ignorance of all those transactions which were going on in respect to the Minister, his wife, and the stratagem devised by the latter,—the worthy woman could not conceive how it was possible Kate had been arrested as a Carlist Spy—an allegation which she herself had not for an instant believed. She accordingly said that she supposed it had been all a mistake on the part of the police?—and Kate, not wishing to be led into farther explanations, readily assured the landlady that such was the case.

At ten o'clock, faithful to her promise, the Minister's wife—again

closely veiled—called upon Kate, and presented her with a packet, not only containing her lover's pardon, but likewise the letters which had been taken from her trunk on the preceding night. Again did Miss Marshall pour forth her fervid gratitude to the excellent hearted lady: again was her joy displayed with bright smiles and glistening tears. Oh! to think that she should have succeeded in her cherished aim after having experienced so many threatening adventures—so much affliction—and even at one time so much despair! This crowning happiness was almost too much for her: but she was not one of those women who are apt to faint in periods of excessive grief or excessive joy; and thus her natural fortitude soon came to her assistance.

She lost no time, while the Minister's wife was still with her, in penning a few hasty lines likewise to her beloved Edward Russell, assuring him that she was about to set off in a post-chaise to meet him at Barcelona. The pardon, and this note for Russell, were enclosed in a packet addressed to Don Diego Christoval: and then Kate hastened to the landlady's apartment, to inform her that her lover's life was saved, without any condition of minor punishment.—and to request that a courier should be at once obtained to bear this second despatch on the heels of the first. The worthy woman was so delighted that she could scarcely leave off embracing Kate, who was naturally impatient that not a minute's unnecessary delay should occur ere the messenger was in his saddle. She saw the man depart; and then hurried up to her own chamber, where the Minister's wife was waiting her return.

"Now, my dear Miss Marshall," said this lady, "before we separate I have a certain duty to fulfil,—a duty which, I have much pleasure in stating, was suggested by my husband: for he feels that even the granting this pardon is scarcely an adequate atonement for his conduct towards you. You perceive, therefore, that his regrets of last night were not transitory. Indeed he has been profoundly touched by all these circumstances—and not the least by the proofs of love which I have exhibited towards him. He desires me to seek on his behalf the express assurance of your forgiveness; and he beseeches that you will not refuse to

accept the contents of this purse—Nay, do not shake your head, my dear Miss Marshall! You will accept this trifling present from me, even if you have any scruple in receiving it from him?"

"Dearest lady," answered Kate, with tears in her eyes, "I consider that I Excellency has made every atonement and from the very bottom of my heart do I forgive him the temporary uneasiness which he caused me. And you dear lady—you have proved yourself the kindest, the best of friends! But cannot accept that purse—I need not—Though not rich, I have ample means for my present purposes—"

"Enough, my dear Miss Marshall interrupted the lady: we will say no more upon that subject. But you will not refuse to wear this for my sake—and she drew from her finger a splendid ring set with brilliants.

Kate could not reject a gift so generously and also so delicately proffered: she accordingly accepted it; and after many embraces and kind words, she and the Minister's wife bade each other farewell. Within the hour, Kate was seated in a post chaise, issuing forth from the Spanish capital on the high road to Barcelona.

CHAPTER CXLVIII.

NED RUSSELL.

ALTHOUGH the Captain-General of Catalonia had the power to suspend the execution of Ned Russell's sentence for three weeks, he had not granted a respite for that full period—but merely indefinitely. Don Diego Christoval was really somewhat alarmed at this circumstance: but in his letters to Kate, he had not chosen to increase her anguish by mentioning it: he however determined, as the reader has seen, to remain at Barcelona, so as to be upon the spot to renew his intercession and exert his influence afresh with the Captain-General, should it be necessary. He tolerably well comprehended the difficulty in which this great functionary found himself placed, and therefore understood how it was that he had not positively and specifically defined the respite for the full period of three weeks.

The fact was, that the utmost indignation prevailed amongst the inhabitants of Barcelona, and the

neighbourhood at the slaughter of the Custom-House officers; and a vindictive spirit called loudly for the summary wreaking of the law's penalty upon the head of Russell. The Political Chief, or supreme civil authority of the principality, was to a certain extent in enmity with the Captain-General; and he failed not to represent as a great grievance, the leniency shown towards the English smuggler-captain by suspending the sentence. Again, the commanders of the Spanish revenue cruisers upon the coast, were terribly enraged at the vessel having escaped them; and requiring a vent of some kind or another for their excited feelings, they also clamoured for the prompt execution of the law's judgment pronounced against Edward Russell.

Thus was it that the Captain-General was sorely pressed by the state of public feeling and by the opinions of the authorities in his district,—so that, at the expiration of a fortnight, he sent for Don Diego Christoval, and assured him that he dared no longer delay issuing the warrant for the execution. This was on the very same day that Kate Marshall paid her second visit to the Minister, to make the appointment for the night,—which appointment, as the reader has seen, was in reality to be kept by the Minister's lady. Count Christoval besought and implored that the Captain-General would suffer the dictates of mercy to ride dominant above the pressure of vindictive sentiments: he assured his Excellency that most strenuous measures were being adopted at Madrid to obtain Russell's pardon—that no doubt this pardon would be vouchsafed—and that he (the Captain-General) would therefore be much afflicted if by precipitating the execution, he should so fatally render abortive the results of the good offices that were actively making their way in the capital. It was upon a Wednesday that these representations were made; that day week the full period of three weeks, to which the Captain-General's discretionary power was limited, would expire. Don Christoval urged that it was but for this one poor week he sought the delay; and if nothing favourable transpired in the meantime, the sentence must then as a matter of course be carried into execution. Still the Captain-General shook his head, refusing to comply. Don Diego would not leave him: he plied

him with all possible arguments and intercessions; and ultimately he succeeded in gaining a portion of what he asked. To be brief, the Captain-General consented to a compromise between his own inclinations on the one hand, and the clamour of the public on the other. He accorded a further delay of three days, adding emphatically that at eleven in the forenoon on the Saturday ensuing, the culprit must be executed, if no counter-instructions of any sort should arrive from Madrid. More than this Count Christoval could not obtain; and therewith he was forced to content himself.

Finding it now, therefore, useless to remain any longer in Barcelona, and not even tarrying to obtain another interview with Ned Russell, whom, we should observe, he had seen almost daily during the fortnight which had elapsed since his arrival at Barcelona,—he mounted his horse and set out on the highway towards Madrid. The distance between Barcelona and the Spanish capital is above three hundred miles; and therefore Don Diego did not entertain the hope of reaching Madrid and returning to Barcelona within the prescribed interval. But he adopted his present proceeding for two reasons. In the first place, he thought it probable that Miss Marshall—if she had obtained the pardon—would, in her loving zeal and tender anxiety, be hastening with it herself to Barcelona,—the more so, as he had led her to suppose that there will still another clear week of respite for Ned Russell. If therefore he were upon the road, he hoped to meet her: he would receive the pardon from her hands—and to make everything sure, would gallop back day and night until he reached the Catalan capital once more. In the second place, he reasoned that she might have entrusted the precious document to a courier; and knowing that these individuals are apt to tarry and drink on the way, he resolved to make inquiries at every station and of every mounted messenger whom he might meet, to ascertain if the hoped-for paper were upon the road to Barcelona.

It was in the forenoon of Wednesday that he thus set out: and being an excellent horseman, as well as accustomed to the fatigues of travelling, he journeyed at a rapid pace. Resting as little as possible, and obtaining a fresh steed as often as circumstances would

permit, he accomplished ninety miles by midnight,—which, considering the nature of the Spanish roads and the sorry animals used for posting or for couriers, was remarkably good. Allowing himself but a couple of hours to recruit his strength, he continued his way. Morning dawned; and after another rest, he sped along. It was about noon on the Thursday, that at a distance of one hundred and sixty miles from Barcelona, he encountered a courier whom he put the same inquiries he had addressed to all the others he had previously met. This courier bore a despatch addressed to himself. It was the one which Kate had set off in the latter part of the previous day, after her interview with the Minister's wife at the hotel; and it contained the written undertaking signed by the Minister. Don Diego therefore saw that every hope was to be entertained: but as Kate intimated that another messenger would be sent off with a despatch to communicate the result, Count Christoval resolved to continue his ride towards the capital and thus fall in with the second messenger. It was late on the Thursday night that he met him; and the letter which he bore, contained the official pardon, duly signed and sealed by the Minister of the Interior. It would be easier to conceive than to depict the joy which the warm-hearted Don Diego experienced at this triumphant crowning of Kate Marshall's magnanimous endeavour to save her lover's life.

But the scene now shifts to Barcelona; and it is Friday night. In the principal square a number of men are raising the scaffold by torchlight. A guard of soldiers, drawn up around, keeps back the approach of the throng of inquisitive observers. The workmen wear masks upon their countenances; and the presence of the soldiery is to prevent the lookers-on from drawing so near as to be enabled to recognize any of these individuals so employed, either by their particular clothing, their stature, their voices, or the accidental slipping aside of their masks. In Spain it is considered infamous for any person to assist in erecting a scaffold for the purpose of a public execution; and it is therefore necessary to raise, as it were, by impressment the requisite workmen for this purpose. It is an act of rebellion on the part of those so impressed to refuse; the authorities however adopt

precautionary measures, as just now explained, to save them from recognition; so that they may not be thereafter taunted by their companions as "gallows-builders." Hence the working at night, and the masks upon the countenances of the workers.

It was a spectacle of solemn and awful interest,—those men with black crape upon their faces, erecting the scaffold in the midst of the square, in the centre of a *cordon* of soldiers,—the lurid glare of the torches guiding their operations, and throwing forth their forms with a Rembrandt-like effect. So closely were the soldiers marshalled in double ranks, that they not merely formed a barrier against the pressure of the crowd without,—but likewise a living wall to intercept the ruddy beams of the torches themselves: but these nevertheless played upon the bayonets, like lurid lightning on the points of so many conductors. In the iron balconies attached to the houses looking upon the square, crowds of persons—male and female, young and old, the well-born and the rich, the humble and the poor—were gathered to gaze upon the ominous spectacle: or rather to catch as much of it as could be seen through the darkness which surrounded the centre of light where the torches blazed. The work advanced rapidly: in a few hours the scaffold rose above the heads of the girdling ranks of soldiery; and long ere the first streaks of dawn were discernible in the horizon which joined the eastern waves, the sinister upright post with the strangling iron was erected. Then, a portion of the guard being left to protect the scaffold, the remainder marched away with the workmen in the midst,—the crowd being forbidden to follow on pain of the most serious consequences. The masked workmen were thus escorted to some obscure part of the city of Barcelona; and having received a liberal remuneration, they dispersed,—sneaking stealthily away to their respective homes.

Morning dawned upon Barcelona: the scaffold complete in all its appointments, stood in the market-place: a guard of soldiers surrounded it. The crowd was every instant becoming more dense,—there being the same anxiety on the part of the Barcelonenses to secure "a good place" to view the execution, as that which the populace of London displays on a public

strangulation day in the Old Bailey. The balconies, too, of the circumjacent houses were thronged from an early hour: high prices were paid for sitting or standing room; and at the casements of many of the principal habitations, well dressed ladies might be seen. These, with their garments of black silk, their mantillas richly bordered with lace, their fans, and their satin slippers, appeared as if they were spectatresses, awaiting the presence of some gorgeous pageant or gay scene, instead of the sombre and sinister procession of death. Yes: there they were, those lovely Catalan women,—seated in their balconies,—some sipping their chocolate, others conversing gaily, others quietly reading a novel,—and all awaiting the dread ceremony with the easiest air in the world.

But what of Ned Russell? what of him for whom the paraphernalia of death had been thus elaborately prepared, and on whose account these crowds were assembled? He was a prisoner in his gloomy cell,—having bidden adieu to all hope, and manfully resigning himself to the fate which he deemed inevitable. He feared not to die; and yet the hardy sailor brushed away a tear as he thought of that loving and much-loved being who would have to deplore his loss. He knew that she was at Madrid, endeavouring to obtain his pardon—or at least a commutation of his sentence: he knew likewise, from the same source (namely, Count Christoval) that she trusted to the strong letters she had received from the Marquis and Marchioness of Villahello, to accomplish her aim; and he knew that her disappointment must prove of the bitterest description. For disappointed she had evidently been—Alas, poor Kate—and again he wiped away a tear. But Count Christoval himself—wherefore came he not? It was now Saturday morning; and not since Tuesday had Russell seen him—nor in the interval had he heard from him. What could this mean? Not for an instant did the frank-hearted sailor suspect that the Spanish nobleman had deserted him at the very last: but he feared lest some accident should have befallen him. Once or twice during that interval, Ned Russell had caught himself giving way to the hope that this absence and silence on Don Diego's part, were in some way or another favourably connected with his own case—that something had transpired to turn the progressive of events

into another channel, requiring the Count's presence elsewhere—and that he had either no time to make a communication, or else that his message or letter had been entrusted to a neglectful emissary. But as the time drew near, Ned Russell suffered himself not to be buoyed up with this hope. He considered it not merely a weakness, but likewise a folly, to give way to hope on such slender grounds;—and with true characteristic courage, he prepared to die. A Franciscan chaplain, attached to the gaol, had on several occasions, since Russell's confinement, endeavoured to persuade him to kneel and pray; but inasmuch as the worthy priest could only convey this intimation by signs—he being as ignorant of the English tongue as the prisoner was of the Spanish,—their intercourse had hitherto amounted to mere dumb show, the priest wishing to enforce his object by means of gestures, and the captive as peremptorily refusing in a similar manner. But on this Saturday morning—the one fixed for the execution—the prison-chaplain made his appearance, accompanied by a brother Franciscan who could speak a little English; and the latter priest endeavoured to persuade Russell to accept the last consolation of religion. Now, Ned never had been at all of a religious character: not that he was an infidel nor a sceptic—on the contrary, he was a firm believer: but his mode of life had, for obvious reasons, somewhat militated against pious habits. He did not now choose to receive consolations from a Catholic: he therefore bluntly enough informed the priest who spoke English, that he should certainly like to have the spiritual comfort of a Protestant clergyman—but that if this were impossible, he would sooner make his peace with heaven in his own way, than accept the ministry of an ecclesiastic belonging to another faith. The priest argued and reasoned with him: the prisoner was firm, though perfectly respectful;—and finding that he could make no impression, the Franciscan knelt down, in company with the chaplain,—the two thus offering up prayers in Ned Russell's cell, but in a language which he could not understand.

He wished to be alone—he wished to commune with himself during the last moments which remained to him in

his life; but the Franciscans would not hear of it—they persisted in remaining; and as he gave them credit for good intentions, he said nothing rude. Withdrawing his attention from them, however, as much as possible, he prayed inwardly, and with a heartfelt devotion which never in his life had he experienced before. But the intercession which he sent up to heaven from the very depths of his soul, was far more on his beloved Kate's account than his own; and he besought Providence to endow her with the fortitude to bear the bitter bereavement which he felt to be inevitable.

The fatal hour approached; and at about a quarter to eleven the executioner entered the cell, accompanied by the governor of the prison, a notary, and three or four *gendarmes*. The notary, read the warrant of execution, signed by the Captain-General, and of the issuing of which the prisoner had received due notice on the previous evening from the governor through the medium of an interpreter. The executioner then proceeded to bind the prisoner's arms and hands, — which he did in such a way as to give him the appearance of being in the attitude of prayer. A glass of wine was next held to his lips; — but this Russell refused: he would not have it thought that he was in the slightest degree indebted to alcoholic liquor for the courage which he felt sure he should be enabled to display.

A procession was now formed, the two priests leading it; and the front gate of the gaol was reached. Several streets had to be threaded in order to arrive at the place of execution. These thoroughfares were completely lined with troops, — behind whom there were but a few stragglers as lookers-on — those whose curiosity was excited on the occasion, having long ere this secured their places in the vicinity of the scaffold. Nor were the balconies of the houses in these streets much crowded, — the inhabitants of those dwellings having likewise proceeded to that point which was the focus of supreme attraction.

Just outside the gate of the gaol, about twenty more Franciscan monks were assembled, — attended by a couple of acolytes, each of whom bore a lantern fixed at the end of a wand, and with wax tapers burning inside, — the breeze which blew from the sea, rendering it necessary for the lights

to be thus protected. But the main feature of the religious paraphernalia remains to be described. It consisted of an enormous crucifix, on which was a paste-board effigy of the Saviour, the size of life. It was carefully and skillfully painted, but had a most hideous and ghastly effect; inasmuch as it represented the gore trickling down from the crown of thorns — from the hands and the feet, pierced with nails — and from the wound in the side. This figure was borne at the procession; and as it advanced, the soldiers crossed themselves, and most of the stragglers behind the military rank, fell upon their knees. The monks began to chaunt the litany in deep lugubrious voices; while two men wearing long dark cloaks, solicited alms, which were to be expended in masses for the doomed man's soul.

In this way the procession threaded the streets leading towards the great square, — on reaching which the hum of voices that had hitherto prevailed on the part of the crowds gathered there, sank into a dead silence; and naught was heard but the chaunting of the priests and the slow tread of footsteps. A pathway up to the scaffold was kept clear in the midst of the multitude, by two lines of soldiers; and over their heads silver and copper coins were showered for the benefit of the prisoner's soul, — the money being duly gathered up by the collectors in the long dark cloaks. Meanwhile Ned Russell had advanced in the midst of the procession with a firm step and a manly bearing. There was no bravado in his look — merely the fortitude of a truly courageous man. He was apparelled in his sailor's garb, — all except his hat, which had been taken from him, it being a part of the ceremony that he should walk bare-headed to the scaffold. But the masses of his coal black hair clustered in natural curls above his high forehead; and doubtless many a spectatress thought it was a pity that so fine a man should be doomed to die. However vindictive the public sentiment had been towards him while he was still in his dungeon, it demonstrated itself not now: — neither by word nor gesture was an inimical feeling displayed: on the contrary, there were some evidences of sympathy in many parts of the crowd and at some of the balconies. Thus the procession moved on, the effigy being carried in front — the

monks chaunting, the alms being collected—the acolytes bearing the lanterns with the wax tapers, and the crowd crossing themselves in respect for that gore stained image of the *Saviour*. The scaffold was reached: the priests ranged themselves in two rows near the steps, up which Ned Russell mounted, accompanied by the executioner, the notary, the *gendarmes*, and the Frenchman who spoke English.

Every eye was strained to observe how the doomed man now conducted himself; but not the slightest evidence of fear could be detected. His step was firm, his looks quailed not, neither did his lips quiver. He bent his gaze intensely upon the upright post to which the strangling-iron was adjoined; and in obedience to a signal made by the executioner, he sat himself down upon a low wooden stool placed against that post. A breathless silence pervaded the crowd: every neck was thrust forward, all eyes were riveted upon that focus of such dread and fearful attraction: the sky was serene above—the sunbeams glinted on the points of bayonet, and on the drawn sabres of the *gendarmes*. It was a perfect sea of faces upturned towards the scaffold: or, to borrow another metaphor, the vast square itself seemed paved with human countenances,—while the spectators in the balconies had the appearance of countless groups of individuals suspended in iron cages to the house fronts. You saw was silent, save and except the deep, hollow chaunting of the priests, in which was drowned the voice of the Frenchman who spoke English, and who was earnestly enjoining the doomed man to press his lips to a small crucifix which he monk approached near enough to his countenance for the purpose. But Russell firmly though respectfully refused to comply with the injunction; and the senior of the *gendarmes* made the executioner a sign to proceed.

The punishment of the *garrote* can be explained in a few words. It consists of a collar of iron attached to a post, and so contrived as to tighten suddenly by the abrupt turning of a screw. The windpipe is thereby instantaneously closed, and death quickly ensues. It is a hideous punishment—and yet perhaps is preferable either hanging or beheading: for blood is shed—neither are the spectators revolted by the three or

four minutes' duration of spasmodic convulsions and horrible writhings on the part of the victim. It must not be thought more painful than decapitation, while it is assuredly less so than death by the halter. Startling as the assertion may seem, it is nevertheless a fact that the head of a guillotined person lives for some seconds—perhaps even a minute, after it is severed from the trunk; while all the most excruciating and keenly agonizing sense of existence is concentrated in the brain, until the nerves terminating there have ceased to throb and vibrate. As for hanging, the protracted convulsions—lasting even as above stated, for some minutes, testify to the extent of the horrific agony endured. But in respect to the *garrote*, it is easy to comprehend how the sudden compressure of the windpipe in so violent a manner produces an almost instantaneous numbness or absence of feeling, in the midst of which life passes away. At all events, it is tolerably certain that this best-named mode of capital execution must be less painful as well as shorter than that of the other two, for the reasons set forth. All three are hideous—abominable—satanic: the punishment of death is a remnant of barbaric cruelty still lingering amidst our modern civilization: it is an atrocity which the good feeling and the good sense of the masses would abolish in a moment, if they had the power, but which is maintained in spite of them by kings and aristocrats the better to enforce those savage laws which prevent society from making that rapid progress which, if it had its full play, would quickly abrogate royalties and patrician orders.

But to return to the scene in the great square of the Catalonian capital. Ned Russell—his arms closely pinioned—was seated upon the stool: the executioner had received the sign to finish the proceeding without delay; and the doomed man was made to place his back completely against the stout upright post. The iron collar was then fastened round his neck: his eyelids quivered not—neither did his lips: he breathed, with the secret voice of his soul, a quick but fervent prayer for Kate Marshall—he commended himself to his God—he thought that he had done with all the affairs of this life, and that in a few moments more he should be a corpse! Profound was the silence which still pervaded the

gathered multitudes—a silence broken only by the low hollow dirge of the priests at the steps of the scaffold: every neck was stretched out—all breath was held: the chests of the men moved not—the bosoms of the women remained upheaved. All was suspense—deep, solemn, awful. The fingers of the executioner were upon the screw: in another twinkling of the eye it would have been all over with thee, Edward Russell!—when, from the extreme outskirt of the crowd, a voice cried out something—this something was taken up by other voices—hundreds of ejaculations swelled into thousands—and like the quick successive fire of musketry, the cries went on till they reached the foot of the scaffold; and then their meaning was understood by the persons standing thereon. It was a reprieve!

The crowd parted from the spot whence those cries had first commenced on the extreme verge: yes—that living ocean of people parted, even as parted the Red Sea to form a passage for the Israelites. And then was beholden a horseman covered with dust, urging the jaded steed along, and holding up a paper in his right hand. Whatsoever feeling of enmity the Barcelonese entertained towards Ned Russell when he was still a prisoner in his cell, had been to a considerable extent changed into sympathy, not unmixed with admiration, when his fine person was seen moving along with manly bearing towards the scaffold: but now both sympathy and admiration swelled into enthusiastic delight—and it seemed as if a really generous feeling, until this moment latent, had blazed up on the part of the myriads gathered there. Hats were waved—fans and kerchiefs likewise: the dark eyes of the Catalan women flashed joy from the balconies and from the midst of the multitudes in the square: adown many a cheek, both male and female, did tears flow. On came the horseman, sitting like one intoxicated upon his steed: for full evident was it that he had journeyed far and had journeyed fast. We need scarcely say that the fingers of the executioner turned not the fatal screw: while Ned Russell felt that he was saved; Then, not on his own account—but for Kate's—dear Kate's—did such a gush of feelings well upward into his throat as almost to suffocate him; and a tear trickled down each cheek. The strong-

minded man who would have scorned to weep for himself, was melted into tenderest feeling as the conviction smote him that he was saved through Kate, and that she at this moment was happy!

On came the horseman amidst the crowd which parted to afford him a passage,—closing however again immediately behind the heels of the jaded horse. On he came—that man so covered with dust—so travel-worn, that his nearest and dearest friends would not have recognized him at the time! On he came, amidst the plaudits of the crowd, with the pardon in his right hand! Although he saw full well that his mission was understood—although he saw likewise that the came not quite too late—yet did he urge the staggering, panting, labouring animal on, until the steps of the scaffold were reached: and then, the instant he pulled in the horse, it dropped down heavily, blood gushing from its mouth and speedily turning into crimson the masses of white foam so thickly gathered there. The horseman was so exhausted that he had not sufficient energy nor agility to vault from the steed as it fell; and he lay beneath it. A dozen eager hands were in a moment stretched forth to extricate him from his dire peril; and this was accomplished to the satisfaction of those who lent their assistance, because they perceived that he was uninjured.

The pardon was handed up to the notary, who at once read it and made known its nature. The Franciscan priest who spoke English, and who was in reality a well meaning kind hearted man, hastened to communicate to Edward Russell that the document contained a full and unconditional pardon. In a moment the cords that bound his arms were severed—he was free: and the next instant his hand was warmly and fervidly grasped by Don Diego Christoval—the wearied and travel-worn horseman. Then shouts of applause rent the skies; and the name of the Count being mentioned as that of the bearer of the pardon, the warm hearted Spanish nobleman found himself as much the object of enthusiastic interest as he whom he had come to save.

Let us pass over a few hours. It was evening—and in a well furnished apartment at the principle hotel at Barcelona, two persons were awaiting the arrival of a third. The table was spread for dinner: the light of the

candles was reflected by a gleefully effervescent play of plate—bottles of champagne were cooling in her hot wine—evident that this was to be a banquet to be partaken of under no ordinary circumstances, although but three were to be allowed to it. One of the two persons with Count Christoval; and he, leaning upon the sofa, still much excited, and the other was Ned Russell, who was walking to and fro in a kind of delirious impatience,—every minute going to the window to see whether the chaise was approaching that was to bear Kate to her arms. He was apparently in an entirely new suit of clothes which Don Diego had lent him, and which set off his tall form to the fullest advantage; which such well-cut garments were calculated to produce. So full of chosen anticipation was his countenance, that whatsoever ravages imprisonment might have produced thereon, were now in that enthusiastic glow.

It was seven o'clock; and according to Count Christoval's computation, Kate might be expected every moment. It will be remembered that the packet he had sent off by the second courier, and which was addressed to his lordship, contained a note for Ned Russell, telling him when she should depart from Madrid, and that she should travel as quickly as possible to join him at Barcelona. Thus was it known that she would not be much longer ere she made her appearance. Nor was she. A chaise presently came dragging along the street, stopped at the entrance of the hotel—Russell waited not to observe who lighted—but darting from the room, he precipitated himself down the stairs; and cries of joy echoed in the hall as he and his beloved Kate were clasped in each other's arms. Oh! that was a joyous meeting—a meeting such as neither of them can ever forget for the remainder of their lives! Nearly nine years have elapsed (at the time this narrative is written) since that memorable evening; and often and often does the recollection thereof come back to them fraught with ineffable feelings; it comes back to them like a delicious harmony floating over the ocean of the past—it comes back to them like a strain of heavenly music, and ever productive of soothing sentiments, making them sadder and better, and strengthening, if possible, the love which they bear for each other and which can know no ending.

But let us not anticipate. Ned Russell conducted Kate Marshall up into the room where Don Christoval was waiting. In a few rapid words he had informed her, as they ascended the stairs, how that excellent-hearted nobleman had arrived in the very nick of time—and how in another instant it would have been too late. Kate threw herself at Don Christoval's feet; she took his hand—she pressed it to her lips: she tried to speak, she could not; her emotions overpowered her. But he understood that the grateful young woman meant to express his tears showed that he thus comprehended her. They sat down to the banquet; and though they were but three, it was as joyous and happy as if there had been a hundred guests vowed to unalloyed hilarity. The sparkling champagne was drunk; and when the feast was over, Miss Marshall related her adventure in full, from the moment she parted with Don Diego Christoval in Catalonia, until the instant the portion was placed in her hands. Ned Russell shuddered when he thus heard of all that his beloved had gone through for his sake—how she had so nearly lost her life in the forest, and what indignities she had suffered at the hands of the Minister of the Interior. But they all three commented lightly and gently upon these latter circumstances, for Kate had come harmless and unscathed through the fiery ordeal which had threatened to brand her chastity; and the Minister had made as much atonement as a man could render for a grievous wrong—a wrong which however was not, after all, irreparable.

On the following day Don Diego Christoval, Ned Russell, and Kate Marshall,—accompanied by a young English woman who happened to be at the hotel, and was desirous to return to her native country,—set out in a post-chaise on their way to France. The young woman was a nursery-governess, who had come to Barcelona with an English family, but whom she had left in consequence of ill-usage. For delicacy's sake, Kate was well pleased to have such a travelling companion added to the party; and the young female herself was rejoiced at the proposal to journey free of expense back to her own island. We need not follow them on the route; suffice it to say that in due course they reached Calais in safety—and thence they

embarked for Dover. Infinite was the joy of Kate's parents and sisters as they welcomed her arrival and hailed the presence of Ned Russell. There were such festivities at the *Admiral's Head*—such tales to tell—such adventures to recite—so much to talk over and over again, that it seemed as if neither the rejoicings nor the narratives would ever end. Don Diego was unfeignedly happy at this spectacle of perfect bliss and he considered the circumstances favourable for a little piece of advice which he had intended to volunteer to Ned Russell. This was to the effect that it would be better for the gallant sailor to avoid his smuggling adventures in future. Thereunto Russell replied that he had already made up his mind, not merely to abandon such expeditions, but to give up the sea entirely,—adding that even if he were utterly desitute of resources, he should consider it his duty to look to some other means of gaining a livelihood, so as to avoid being ever more separated from the admirable young woman who had saved his life. But he had some little property wherewith to commence the world anew; and moreover, the sale of his vessel, which had arrived safely in port, would increase his store. Don Diego then proceeded to observe, in as delicate a manner as possible, that by way of indemnifying Ned Russell for the loss of his freight which fell into the hands of the Spanish Custom House officers, he intended to make him a present of five hundred pounds. Russell would not hear of it: the Count insisted. Old Marshall overheard what was going on, and backing Ned's decision, promised to provide so bountifully for his daughter when the marriage should take place, as to supersede the necessity of this farther display of his lordship's generosity. The Count was therefore over-ruled: but before he left Dover, he made Kate and Ned Russell such handsome presents that, so far as the amount went, they almost fulfilled his original intention.

"We shall be married in three weeks, my lord," said Russell, just previously to the nobleman's departure for Edenbridge Park, on the second day after his arrival at Dover,—the Marshalls having compelled him to give them his company thus long,—treating him as if he were a god who has descended amongst them,—“we shall be married in three weeks, my

lord; and depend upon it, I shall make the best of husbands, as I am sure Kate will make the best of wives. Do you think, my lord, that if ever anything was to put her out and she did say a harsh word—which I know she won't,—but even if she did, do you think I would give her one in return? No, never! I would kiss her back into good humour. I would sooner kill myself than draw a tear from her eye, or make her beautiful face look mournful by any conduct on my part. I shall never forget what she has done for me—never forget all that she has gone through! The bare idea of it, as well as my own sufferings, has made me an altered, and I think, a better man. As for your lordship, your name will ever be a household word with us—And,” added Ned Russell, “if we are blessed with a son, I shall take the liberty—and hope no offence—of calling him Christoval after your lordship.”

“And depend upon it,” responded the warm-hearted nobleman, “I shall be rejoiced to stand god-father.”

Don Diego took his departure, followed by the kindest wishes and sincerest expressions of gratitude on the part of Ned Russell and the Marshalls. On the very same day Kate gave away her carrier-pigeons to some neighbour who had long fancied them, and who she was well aware would treat them kindly; and the little reception-place, as well as the curiously contrived trap door, disappeared from the roof of the *Admiral's Head*. Kate looked back with sorrow upon the somewhat lax notions which she had hitherto entertained in certain particulars: for she also felt, as did her intended husband, that the incidents of the last few weeks had their moral teachings which were not to be disregarded. In this better frame of mind she possessed all the elements to render her an admirable member of society; and such she was resolved to become. The same purifying influence was shed throughout the family; and no long interval of time elapsed ere they felt that calamity and adversity often have their sovereign uses.

Three weeks after the return to Dover, Ned Russell led Kate Marshall to the altar. It was a blithe and happy day; and again was the *Admiral's Head* a scene of festivity and rejoicing.

CHAPTER CXLIX.

THE WIFE.

THE reader will not have forgotten that the mansion of the Viscount and Viscountess de Chateaufort stood upon a gentle eminence about a mile distant from the picturesque village of Auteuil. We have already stated that by his marriage with the sugar-baker's daughter, the Viscount obtained an annual revenue equivalent to twenty thousand pounds sterling of British money; and this income, large for any individual in any country, was an immense one for a French nobleman. It is therefore scarcely necessary to observe that the chateau was furnished in the most sumptuous manner—or that there were troops of domestics forming the household establishment. But riches do not constitute happiness, and this was a truth which the poor Viscountess could, if she had chosen, proclaim with the utmost sincerity.

Stephanie possessed a warm and generous disposition: but her mind was not as powerful as her heart was sensitive. She loved her husband with all that heart and with all her soul; and she had expected, on accompanying him to the altar, that his attachment would be equally fervid. She soon however found that it was not so; and, as Madame Durand had explained to Mrs. Chesterfield, the Viscountess sought to find in herself the causes of this coldness on her husband's part, rather than to make them the source of reproach towards him. She exerted all her powers to please: she was never wearied of lavishing upon him the most delicate attentions and the tenderest caresses, if he would only give her an opportunity of proffering them. She studied to render herself agreeable: she scrupulously examined her own conduct, bearing, and manners,—comparing them with those of her female acquaintances,—in order to ascertain wherein she herself was deficient, so that she might improve according to those finished modes. But her endeavours were thrown away, so far as her husband was concerned. Two years had they been married at the time when we introduce them to our reader; and it seemed as if the Viscount was thoroughly wearied of his wedded life. Any society was agreeable to him in preference to that of his spouse and yet he had not as yet treated her

with direct unkindness, much less with downright cruelty. But he was indifferent; or perhaps indeed he entertained a stronger feeling in respect to her—one bordering upon aversion. Sufficiently magnanimous, however, to conceal this, he forced himself to treat her with courtesy when they were together: but courtesy from a husband to a wife is a very sorry substitute for the endearments of love.

The reader will recollect that we took a temporary leave of Augusta Chesterfield and the Viscount de Chateaufort, at the moment when the former consented to abandon herself to the latter, and when the young nobleman, full of rapturous delight, snatched her to his breast. A fortnight had now passed since that date; and the Viscount was a constant visitor at the Durands' villa. He passed nearly his whole time with Mrs. Chesterfield: he was infatuated with her. Possession was not accompanied with satiety; on the contrary, it only augmented the vehemence of the passion which he experienced for her. Perhaps the ardour of her own temperament sustained the fiery feeling of sensuous desire which her truly remarkable beauty had in the first instance excited: while her conversation—for she was a highly accomplished and intellectual woman—rendered her an agreeable companion. Thus was it that the Viscount was never wearied of her society; and he regretted that he could not be entirely with her from morning till night and from night till morning. But he had not as yet thought of perpetrating an abrupt outrage towards his wife by abandoning her altogether,—though even *this* he would assuredly have done, if Augusta Chesterfield required him. She however had said naught on the subject—but had rather acted as if she were anxious to avoid an explosion of scandal as much as possible, and to keep their amour as secret for the present as circumstances would permit. Such, at least, appeared to be her policy. As a matter of course, the Durands saw what was going on; but they were by no means shocked thereat—nor did Madame Durand venture the slightest remonstrance. In the first place, those things are not thought of so much in France as they are in this country; and in the second place, the Viscount de Chateaufort failed not to make the Durands some very handsome presents almost immediately after his

connexion with Mrs. Chesterfield had begun. Nor were the servants at the little villa forgotten; and a liberal *douceur*, presented to each, ensured the secrecy that was thus sought to be obtained.

We have said that a fortnight had elapsed since the commencement of that amour; and we must now direct the reader's attention to a particular morning, when the following scene took place.

In a sumptuously furnished apartment at the chateau on the eminence, the Viscount and Viscountess were seated at breakfast. The young lady was, as Madame Durand had described her, eminently beautiful,—with chesnut hair, dark blue eyes, and a transparent complexion. Of slender shape, she possessed a figure the lightness of which was replete with elegance and grace, but not of too sylphid a symmetry to be without well-developed proportions. She had not that vivacity which usually characterizes the women of France; but her manners, as well as her style of beauty, would have led a stranger to pronounce her a native of England. She was more tranquil than the gay Parisian ladies are wont to be: modest, unassuming, and with affectation, she was as incapable of coquetry or of flirting as she was averse to the fulsome adulation which is offered up at the shrine of female beauty in the brilliant circles of fashion. Thus, when she sought to be very cheerful, in the hope of pleasing her husband, the endeavour was visibly forced,—because she was too unskilled in the arts of dissimulation to conceal it. But let us listen to their discourse, as they are seated at the breakfast table between nine and ten o'clock on the particular morning of which we are speaking.

"My dear Jules," said the Viscountess, after a long pause, and now speaking with a considerable degree of hesitation, though in the most affectionate manner, "I hope you will not forget that you have guests to dinner this evening?"

"Ah, I remember!" he ejaculated, with an air of vexation: "a party made expressly for the Villebelles! It was absolutely necessary to invite them; for the Marquis and I were school-fellows—though he is some three or four years older than myself."

"You seem annoyed, my dear Jules," observed his wife, gazing upon him with tender anxiety, "that the Marquis

and Marchioness of Villebelle should have been invited?"

"Oh, no! not annoyed, I can assure you!" exclaimed the Viscount, forcing himself to laugh with an assumed gaiety. "Annoyed?—no, that is out of the question—only I was thinking that it was just possible I might be detained by business——"

"Pardon me for asking the question," said the Viscountess, kindly,—"but have you, my dear Jules, anything to trouble you? If so, pray speak, that I may do my best to soothe and console you."

"Trouble me, Stephanie!" he cried. "What could have put such an idea into your head?"

"Only," she answered, still more timidly and reluctantly than before, "because—because—you have been away from home so much of late—that—that—I was fearful you had some business of a disagreeable nature——"

"And pray, Stephanie," exclaimed Viscount somewhat sharply, "can I not be away a few hours of a day without subjecting myself to be thus catechized?"

"Oh! catechized, Jules! No—not for the world! I did not mean *that*,"—and as the big tears rolled down the poor young lady's cheeks, she rose from her place at the table, and throwing her arms around her husband's neck, besought him in a broken voice to pardon her if she had offended him.

"Offended me—no, Stephanie! you have not offended me!" he said, forcing himself to give a single caress for the dozens she lavished upon him: and then he suddenly repulsed her, as if the kiss which he had bestowed was an act of treason towards Augusta Chesterfield.

Thus did he prove himself more scrupulously considerate on behalf of his mistress who was elsewhere, than on behalf of his beautiful wife who was there present, doing her best to demonstrate the love she bore him!

"Jules, wherefore repulse me?" she murmured, with a look of such deprecating tenderness that his conscience was smitten. "What have I done to grieve or annoy you? You assure me that you are not offended with me, and yet I perceive the contrary. Tell me what I can do to convince you that it was unintentional on my part."

"Really, my dear Stephanie, you are most unreasonable," said the Viscount. "Pray sit down and think no more of

what I have said—what I have done—”

“But if you be angry with me, Jules!” she observed, as she meekly resumed her chair.

“Angry—no!” he cried almost petulantly. “Wherefore should you persist in saying that I am angry? Really, Stephanie, I must henceforth be very guarded over my looks and my words, that the least thing thus brings tears to your eyes.”

“Do you not know, Jules,” she continued, still weeping, “how much I love you? and will you be so cruel as to upbraid me for being sorry when I think I have given you offence, or when I fail to please you? I wish—I wish, Jules, that you would understand me better!”

“Stephanie, I understand you full well,” the Viscount hastened to respond; “but we have been married two years, and are no longer lovers; we are husband and wife.”

“No longer lovers?” she ejaculated, as if a new light had suddenly been kindled in upon her mind; then, as the tears gushed forth anew from her eyes, she added, “Oh, I had hoped and thought we should not cease to exist as such because our hands were united at the altar.”

“See, Stephanie,” ejaculated the Viscount, “how unreasonably—I might almost say, how foolishly you talk. And is because these ideas which you have so expressed, rule your actions likewise, that I may perhaps seem a little impatient towards you. At the slightest word you weep—you frequently give me hints that I am absent from home—and in the presence of friends your conduct is *too* endearing. You do not seem to know how to draw the proper distinction between the bearing which lovers adopt towards each other, and that which husband and wife ought to maintain.”

“I only know, Jules,” was the unsophisticated answer of the beautiful Viscountess, while her heart swelled with emotions,—though she now contrived by a powerful effort to keep back her tears, fearing to give her husband renewed offence.—“I only know that I love you; and I obey the dictates of my own heart in all my conduct towards you.”

“But do you not see, Stephanie,” resumed her husband, “that a man cannot always remain tied to his wife’s apron string. When we are

together, I do my best to render you happy and contented——”

“Yes—*when* we are together,” she murmured, without the slightest intention of conveying a remonstrance or a reproach but merely giving audible expression to her own unsophisticated thoughts: for the idea that was uppermost in her mind, was that she had no earthly happiness save and except in the society of her husband, and that she could wish him to be always with her.

“Now, look how you answer me!” he cried, with a sudden start and gesture of impatience. “If I make a simple observation, your reply is a remonstrance—an upbraiding—a taunt——”

“Good heavens,” Jules, what a construction you put upon my words!” she exclaimed, an expression of anguish upon her countenance, and her hands clasped in despair. “I did not mean it, no, I did not mean it! Why will you thus take offence, dear Jules, where none was intended?”

“But, Stephanie, these scenes are little calculated to render my home happy. And,” added the Viscount, greedily clutching at any excuse which might satisfy his conscience for his treatment towards his beautiful and affectionate wife: “and—and—it is really no wonder that I should sometimes stay out longer than I otherwise intended——”

“Oh!” she exclaimed, “now I have learnt the fatal truth at last! Yes, yes—I all along suspected it! Nay, more—I was convinced of it! It is I who make your home wretched—it is I who drive you from it!—and yet heaven knows that I would make any sacrifice to keep you with me! I am miserable when you are absent: and therefore it would be madness on my part wilfully to force you remain away.”

With these words, the unhappy young lady covered her countenance with her hands, and burst into a fresh paroxysm of anguish. Her bosom was convulsed with sobs; and if the most dreadful calamity had just alighted upon her head, it was impossible for her to be more afflicted. In the midst of this scene a domestic in a splendid livery entered the room, bearing the morning letters and newspapers upon a silver salver. The Viscount snatched them up in a petulant manner: while Stephanie, quickly removing her fair white hands

from her face, leant over her plate to conceal her tears from the lacquey.

"See how you disgrace me!" ejaculated her husband, when the servant had retired and the glided door had closed behind him. "Now I shall acquire the reputation of ill-treating you. That fellow will go amongst the other servants and say how he found you in tears."

"Forgive me, Jules—pray forgive me, my dearest husband! I see that I am always in the wrong——"

"There you are again, with your reproaches!" interrupted the Viscount. "You mean me to understand that I am in the wrong—that I treat you cruelly——"

"Good heavens!" murmured the unfortunate Viscountess, now wringing her hands in despair! "what am I to do—what am I to say, to convince you that I had no such intention? Ah, Jules, if you could only read my heart, as God now reads it——"

"Positively, Stephanie," ejaculated the Viscount, starting up angrily from his seat, "this scene is becoming wearisome to a degree. If we were still lovers, it would be bad enough; but from a wife to her husband, it is really intolerable. I must beg and beseech that you will not give way to these gusts of temper."

"Temper?" she echoed, as if a new light had broken in upon her, thus suddenly making her aware that her temper was a bad one—an assurance which she was fully prepared to take on the mere word of her husband, and to adopt the fault as sincerely and contritely as if the imputation were perfectly correct.

"Yes, *temper*!" he answered, somewhat fiercely: for on his side the impression was that his wife had echoed the word in a spirit of indignant repudiation: "I said *temper*—and since it has come to this, I may as well be candid with you at once. Now, look you, Stephanie," he continued—and we must do him the justice to add that he did not at the moment perceive how his unfortunate spouse was regarding him with mingled affright and dismay—"look you, Stephanie! I am getting thoroughly wearied of these scenes: they are repeated too often. Always tears, or else implied upbraidings—and then a perfect storm of lavished endearments! That is not the life I wish to lead. Try and be always the same; and I shall be always the same to you. But don't

disgrace me in the presence of our servants. You seem to think, Stephanie, as I just now said, that I am to be ever tied to your apron strings—that now I have become the husband, I am still to play the lover. I can do nothing of the sort; and what is more, I do not intend to attempt it. If you think that because you brought me a fortune, you have a right to a devotion such as is only displayed during the period of courtship——"

"Jules," exclaimed the Viscountess, springing forward and falling upon her knees at her husband's feet, while her clasped hands were stretched out towards him: "do not—do not, for heaven's sake, attribute such unworthy thoughts to me! My fortune—or the fortune that I brought you—I have never once thought of it! Would to God that I had been ten times as rich, that I might have bestowed all, all upon you——"

Here was another offence—though the reader may full easily comprehend how very far it was from the unfortunate young lady's intention to give it. But she stopped short suddenly, perceiving how her husband started—how his countenance became stern—and how he drew himself up with the haughtiest dignity.

"Madam," he said, "rise from that posture. It is not one which I ever desire my wife to adopt towards me."—then as the Viscountess rose to her feet—cowed, dismayed, and full of anguish—he went on to say, in a tone which struck her as implacably severe, "Your words have conveyed such a taunt as I little expected ever to hear issue from your lips. You would remind me that I owe my wealth to you; and though you gave the assurance the semblance of love, yet was it the cruellest of reproaches thus to declare that you wished you had been richer so as to lavish your fortune upon me! Ah! then I am a sort of pensioner—I am bribed with gold! Verily, madam, I would have you reflect that rank is above wealth, and that I gave you a name which all the sugar baker's money-bags never could have purchased."

With this heartless speech the Viscount de Chateauneuf turned abruptly upon his heel: but as a low moan struck his ear, he was smitten with remorse for what he had said; and turning quickly round again, was only just in time to catch his anguished wife in his arms. For, overpowered

the cruel violence of that blow which words had dealt her, she was tottering about to fall.

"Stephanie! Stephanie!" he exclaimed, half petulantly, half kindly: "lookish of you to provoke these scenes!" yet he felt that he himself was wrong, and thus endeavouring to throw all the blame upon her.

"Forgive me, Jules," she murmured, "it was a luxury thus to be clasped in your arms. I do indeed see that my conduct has been very wrong. I know that I make you unhappy every day, and I do not know how to convince you of my own feelings. I know that I am not fitted to be your wife. But hear with me, Jules; and I will leave you—Oh! I will endeavour to be more guarded in future!"

Well, well, Stephanie," said the Viscount, his conscience torturing him as if serpents were planting themselves in his ears,—"let there be an end of this."

"There shall Jules," she murmured, "I will cling sweetly upon him as I have done, and I will clasp her slender waist. But tell me that you love me—do tell me that you love me——"

At this instant the door again opened, and the lacquey reappeared bearing in the silver salver a letter, which by accident had been omitted from the box previously brought in. The Viscount became crimson, and turned away from Stephanie as if he had been caught embracing the wife of another instead of his own. The incident was a most awkward one. The quarrel, if such it could be called, where the quarrelling was all on his own side, had just been about to end in reconciliation, when the appearance of his servant made all Jules Chateaufort's choler rise up again.

"Stephanie, this is perfectly intolerable!" he ejaculated vehemently, and most fiercely, the moment the lacquey had again left the room. "You disgrace me thoroughly! At first it is whining and crying, so that the servants think you are treated: then it is this maiden complaining, so that they will fancy I am begging your pardon, confessing I am a mighty boy, and that I will never do such a thing again! Now, all this is only bringing me into contempt, and when next I look my servants in the face, I shall see a sneering smile upon their lips, brought about by your folly——"

"I am indeed most unfortunate," murmured the poor young lady, sinking

down upon a seat. "I endeavoured to please you—but I cannot!"

"There you are again!" ejaculated the Viscount, stamping his foot upon the carpet. "Why will you persist in this style of upbraiding? It does no good—it only creates ill feeling——"

"My dear husband," said Stephanie, now rising up, and looking as well as speaking with a sort of despairing calmness, "I am afraid that you will never have real happiness with me. I am not fitted to be your wife: I am beneath you in birth—beneath you in education—beneath you in knowledge of the world——"

"Stephanie, you will drive me mad!" cried Jules: for these were precisely the ideas which he *did* entertain in respect to his wife, but which nevertheless he could not bear to have so forcibly brought to his mind, and by that very wife herself. "You must not talk thus——"

"Well, I will not. We will speak on other subjects. Ah! I remember, we were just now conversing about the dinner party: for the Villebelles, you will remember, are coming. What little I saw of the Marchioness the other day, when you introduced me to her, I liked very much. I should be pleased to cultivate her acquaintance: I think she would become my friend;—and I feel that I do want a friend—a real friend! There are times when I am so lonely—so dull—so desponding——"

This was another unfortunate speech, but made in a perfectly artless manner and most unreflectingly.

"By heaven, another taunt!" ejaculated the Viscount. "How many more complaints! However," he immediately added, perceiving that his poor wife was becoming so deadly pale again that it seemed as if she were about to faint,—"we will not say any more now—we will not renew these unpleasant topics."

"No, don't—pray don't," she murmured, with a look of earnest appeal: then approaching him half tenderly, half timidly—but not venturing to embrace him, nor even to take his hand, nor place her own lovingly upon his shoulder, as she longed to do,—she said, "Do not forget, dear Jules, that the company will be here by seven. And," she added, perfectly innocent of any sinister motive, "it is not yet eleven o'clock: so you have plenty of time to amuse yourself till dinner."

He was about to ejaculate that this was another taunt: but feeling the inutility of renewing the war of words—or rather of prosecuting it on his own side—he said, “No, no—I shall not forget—I will be home by seven:”—and he quitted the room.

Stephanie proceeded mechanically towards one of the windows; and in a few minutes, as he gazed vacantly forth, she observed her husband hurrying along in the direction of Auteuil. He was on foot: she looked wistfully after him in the hope that he would turn his head and wave his hand—but he did not; and she could not help feeling disappointed that he should not think it possible she might be at the window. Then, as she remained there watching his receding form, she could not help noticing the hurried manner in which he was proceeding;—and now she bethought herself that for the last fortnight he had not been once out on horseback. This circumstance had not occurred to her before: and though not for a single instant did she now regard it as suspicious, yet she nevertheless wondered thereat. She knew how passionately fond he had ever been of equestrian exercise; and it was therefore natural she should marvel that he had ceased to take it. But she soon fell into another train of reflections in respect to Jules; and retiring to her own boudoir, sat herself down to review all the details of the scene which had just taken place,—so as to glean therefrom the necessary hints to reform her conduct for the future. For the poor creature really and truly believed that all the fault was on her own side; and that she therefore did indeed require such self-reformation.

CHAPTER CL.

THE MISTRESS.

THE Viscount de Chateaufneuf hurried along in the direction of the Durand's villa. He sped thus precipitately, in order if possible to outstrip his own thoughts. He was too intelligent not to comprehend that he had been harsh, severe, and cruel towards his wife; and he was too generous not to regret it. Still he really and truly did believe that she had intended as taunts some of the things which she had said; but he could

not help acknowledging that by his own conduct he fully deserved them. He knew that he was wrong—he knew that Stephanie loved him—and he felt that he was guilty of a monstrous injustice in punishing her for the very testimonials of affection which she lavished upon him. There was a moment during this rapid run from his chateau to the villa, when he felt inclined to turn abruptly back—retrace his steps—take his wife in his arms—confess his error—and vow that he would be cruel to her no more: for this was the first time that ever such serious words had passed between them, or that he had actually shown open resentment at what he had described as the “scenes” which were wont to take place. Hitherto those scenes had been insignificant in comparison with this one of to-day; and thus was it that his remorse was for an instant so poignant.

But, alas! that good resolution was abandoned almost as suddenly as formed: he had not the moral courage to retrace his way and perform the part which his better feelings had for an instant suggested. Besides, could he abandon his Augusta? No, no—he could not; and he hastened onward to the Durand's villa. For the rest of the distance he endeavoured to reason himself into the belief that he was justified in the course he was pursuing—that Stephanie was indeed unfitted to be his wife—and that he had therefore a right to have a mistress. And then, too, he contrasted Augusta with Stephanie—the former all fervid passion, the latter all girlish love without its fiery sensuality—the former glowing and ardent, the latter only sentimentally tender—the former a companion who could talk upon a thousand things, the latter an inexperienced creature whose very ingenuousness was irksome and whose *naïveté* was that of a school-girl. Still, as the Viscount thus drew his comparison between his mistress and his wife, he could not crush the secret feeling which was in his mind, that his conduct was an injustice, an outrage, and a cruelty towards that affectionate being who he knew would, if necessary, lay down her life to serve him. He was glad when he reached the villa; for he lounged in the arms of Augusta to forget all these remorseful and compunctious feelings.

Mrs. Chesterfield was half reclining upon a sofa in the sitting room when Jules de Chateaufneuf made his appearance.

wore an elegant morning
upper, somewhat more open at the
om than was consistent with modes-
the luxuriant masses of her raven
floated over her half-naked
alders; and her large dark eyes swam
delicious languor, as she smilingly
comed the Viscount's presence. The
crackled and blazed in the fire-place;
atmosphere of the apartment was
m and slightly perfumed. Though
yet mid-day, the appearance of
voluptuous creature and the fra-
nce which seemed to breathe around
made the hour appear as fitted for
blandishments of love as if night
e upon the earth, the curtains
drawn, and the lamp light-

You are later than usual, my dear
s," said Augusta, as he placed him-
on the sofa by her side and encircled
er waist with his arm. "Ah! and
receive that something has troubled
," she added, her taper fingers push-
back the masses of naturally curling
from over the high forehead of that
thful countenance which was so fine
ecimen of masculine beauty. "Tell
dearest Jules,"—and she imprinted
owing kiss upon his cheek. "What
that has annoyed you?"
Augusta," he replied, with the sud-
ness of a resolve taken in a moment,
cannot lead this life any longer! I
not divide my time between you and
wife: my heart is *here*—and I am
ried of playing the dissembler *there*.
cruel and unjust towards every one—
el and unjust towards you—cruel and
ust towards my wife—cruel and un-
towards myself! No, I can endure
o longer! I must be all in all to you,
you are all in all to me—I will leave
no more!"

"Tell me, dear Jules, what has taken
oe," said Mrs. Chesterfield, gazing
h fervid tenderness upon her para-
ur. "Have you had words with the
countess?"
"Words?" he ejaculated: "hence-
th I feel that we shall always have
rds, if we continue to live together! It
not be! It is impossible that I can
eive her caresses only to repulse
m: *that* is a part my better feelings
I not longer allow me to play. No,
annot! Much rather would I break
th her at once—candidly confess to
that I love another—and beseech
not to interfere with my happi-

While he was thus speaking, Mrs.
Chesterfield drooped her head upon his
breast; and as her countenance was
thus concealed from him, an expression
of triumphant satisfaction appeared
thereon,—as if she felt that she had now
brought him to the point towards which
she had gradually and cautiously, and
skillfully been leading him on. And if he
could only have seen that look, transient
though it were, a veil would have fallen
from his eyes in a moment; he would
have penetrated the selfishness of the
siren to whom he had abandoned him-
self—he would have had the conviction
flashing to his soul that though the
ardour of her sensual passions might be
real enough, the tenderness of true love
which she professed for him, was naught
but a delusion and a snare!

"What would you do?" she asked,
assuming a low tremulous voice: "would
you precipitate matters?"

"There can be no rash precipitation,"
he exclaimed, "in doing that which has
now become imperative. I must either
renounce you or my wife. I cannot re-
nounce you, my Augusta, whom I love so
devotedly; but I will renounce her whom
I love not and have never loved. The
world must know it at length: but
the world shall say I have not been
unjust towards her. I will give
her half my fortune; the remaining
half will leave me still rich—amply
rich enough for you and me to live in
comfort, and even in splendour."

"Then do you mean, my beloved
Jules," asked Augusta, "that we are to
live openly together henceforth—that
the necessity for secrecy shall exist no
more—that caution shall no longer be
used?"

"Such is my meaning," ejaculated
the Viscount vehemently. "Do you
object, Augusta? do you still tremble at
the idea of all this coming to your hus-
band's knowledge?"

"Candidly I do," she answered, rais-
ing her head and looking him earnestly
in the face.

"You have something in your mind?"
he said. "speak—what is it? Have I
not sworn to be as a husband unto
you?—wherefore need you care for
him who is absent? Have I not vowed
to be a father for your expected babe?
—what anxiety, then, can you enter-
tain for the future welfare of your as
yet unborn child? Speak, Augusta—
speak candidly!"

"Oh! it is all this," she murmured, forcing tears from her eyes, "which troubles me and makes me wretched. It is only when you are with me that I am happy: because *then* I forget everything—the virtuous past—the guilty present—the uncertain future. But when I am alone, a thousand terrors haunt me. I have a husband who is rich, and under whose care neither myself nor my expected offspring need ever tremble at the idea of want. It is not even now too late for me to take a step which will still leave me in that state of confidence! My husband need not know that I have been guilty—that I have dishonoured him: these people here are bribable; and you, as a man of honour, would never breathe to a soul what has taken place between us. But I must fly hence—I must see you no more!"

"Oh, wherefore this language?" exclaimed the Viscount: "what have I done to deserve it? You apprehend poverty—Good heavens! am I not far richer than your husband, from all that you have told me? and can I not at any moment place you in a state of independence? Ah, I comprehend!—your fears are natural, as the world goes; though in respect to *me*, they are not just. You fancy that my love may cool——"

"Remember, my dear Jule," interrupted the syren, murmuringly, "the love of man is different from that of a woman. A woman may conceive a sudden passion and yet cling to it devotedly for all the rest of her life-time: but a man who loves suddenly, grows cool suddenly——"

"Augusta, I swear that you do me wrong!" ejaculated the Viscount de Chateaufort. "The passion I have experienced for you, has become interwoven with the very fibres and principles of my entire being. But it is my aim and my duty to ensure your happiness——Oh! full well do I appreciate the immensity of the sacrifice which you have already made for me, but which has still to be consummated! Now listen, Augusta; and you shall have proof that I love you—you shall have proof too that I am an honourable man!"

"I know it, Jules—I know it," she said, nestling still closer to him, and pressing her dewy red lips to his cheeks.

"What would I not do for you,

adorable creature?" he said, straining her to his breast. "Again I say listen. It is decided—I part from my wife, and from that moment must you be as a wife to me. But no care shall you have for the future. In resigning before the whole world the husband who is absent, you shall—as I before said—be placed in a condition of independence. My revenue consists of twenty thousand a year, speaking in the money of your own native land. One half I assign to my wife; ten thousand remain to myself. Of this sum I shall settle a clear moiety upon you. Nay, offer no objection! It is paltry and miserable to proffer money-considerations as proofs of love; but in existing circumstances it is needful—and you will regard my conduct in that light. I will proceed forthwith to a notary: I will order the deed to be drawn up. In a few days it will be in readiness; and at the hour when I sign it in your presence, must you renounce every family tie, if need be—and become wholly and unconditionally mine! From that hour too shall we dwell together, wheresoever your inclination may suggest that we fix our abode: and we shall be as husband and wife. But now, Augusta, not another word on this subject! not a remonstrance! I am determined: it is a duty—and I will fulfil it!"

The wily woman could well afford a perfect gush of enthusiastic feeling as she strained the young Viscount in her arms and covered his cheeks and his lips with kisses.

"And now I go," he said, "at once to give the requisite instructions to a notary. I shall return to pass a few hours with you. Unfortunately I have guests this evening at the chateau; and I must be there—inasmuch as for the present it is better I should keep upon terms with my wife until all arrangements be carried out. So that at six o'clock I shall be compelled to leave you: but to-morrow I promise to be earlier with you than to-day."

Having embraced Augusta Chesterfield, the Viscount de Chateaufort took his departure to give instructions to a notary to prepare two deeds—one making over half his revenue, together with the chateau itself, to Stephanie—and the other assigning so much of his property as would produce five thousand a year, to the woman with whom he was so profoundly infatuated.

Soon after six o'clock in the evening, the Viscountess de Chateau

menced her toilet for the party. of her maids, on ascending to her dress's chamber to render the wondrous assistance, gave her the pleasing intelligence that the Viscount had just red and was likewise gone to dress. Stephanie was relieved from her lest he should not be punctual. A before seven they met in the drawing-room; and for the first few moments Viscount was troubled and embarrassed, as he thought that in a few days as to deal a blow fatal to the happiness of the unfortunate and confiding who now greeted him with such smiles. This feeling rendered him usually kind, and even affectionate towards her:—at least his manner had the appearance of affection; and Stephanie radiant with happiness, as she said to herself, "Yes, he loves me—he loves how could I ever have doubted it?"

a few minutes the guests began arrive—some fifteen or sixteen in all; amongst them the Marquis of Villebelle and Constance. The Marquis had in the last few days received a much more and far more lucrative appointment than that which he had held at Court of Madrid: he was now to be admitted as Minister to the Court of Spain—but he had still leave of absence for a few weeks ere setting out on his new post. Being prosperous in worldly circumstances and blessed in love for Constance, he was supremely happy; and his fine countenance testified the feelings of his heart. The Marchioness of Villebelle—for so we must call Constance—looked eminently beautiful and she also was happy in her husband's love, as well as in the consolation of the honours bestowed upon her by the King, and which his own merits had won. But still the felicity of Lady Saxondale's younger daughter was not completed inasmuch as she had some time past been troubled and anxious on account of those relatives who were so dear to her. She had heard of the terrific exposure which had place a few months back at Saxon-Castle, when the double wedding was so strangely interrupted and broken off: she knew therefore that her sister Juliana was thoroughly and irredeemably disgraced, and that her mother's health had suffered at the same time in the nation of the world. She likewise knew that her mother and Juliana were now together—that the former was in England, and the latter somewhere

upon the Continent; and she was grieved that her sister suffered her not to become acquainted with the place of seclusion to which she had retired. Constance was also aware that her brother Edmund had married the Baroness de Charlemont who was tried for the murder of her first husband;—and all these circumstances were sufficient to depress her somewhat. Nevertheless, her husband's love—so sincere and so devoted—was powerful enough to mitigate much of that full amount of grief which she would otherwise have experienced: and no one, as she entered the brilliantly lighted saloon at the Viscount de Chateaufort's mansion, would have suspected that the felicity of the Marchioness of Villebelle was thus alloyed.

We will pass over all details in respect to the sumptuous banquet which was served up: let our readers suppose it to be over, and the company dispersed about the suite of gilded and brilliantly lighted saloons thrown open for their reception. There was music in one: in another the tables were spread with splendidly bound volumes and prints; in a third the card tables were set out: and the fourth opened upon a spacious winter-garden, or conservatory of glass, heated by artificial means, and containing a varied selection of the choicest plants as well as of several fruit trees from the tropics. The Viscountess de Chateaufort and the Marchioness of Villebelle, who had already conceived a friendship for each other, were seated together upon a sofa in the music-room: a young lady was at the piano—another at the harp: others were sitting with young gentlemen and listening to the melody, or perhaps whispering with each other: the elderly gentlemen and ladies were in card-room: in short, all the company were agreeably occupied in in some way or another. The Marquis of Villebelle had accompanied the Viscount de Chateaufort into the conservatory; and for some little time they were engaged in examining the exotics and the fruits of the palm, the banana, the citron, and the orange trees.

"My dear Viscount," said the Marquis, when the inspection was concluded, "you and I have known each other since our boyhood; and though there has been an interval of some

years since last we saw each other, yet is the friendly feeling of other times in no way diminished on my part."

"Nor on mine, my dear Villebelle," responded Chateauf, warmly grasping the hand of the Marquis.

"I am sure of it," resumed the latter; "and therefore you will not think it strange or impertinent that I am about to speak to you on a certain subject. In a word, my dear friend, you are not happy: and if there be any circumstance in which you require the counsel or consolation of one who experiences a sincere regard for you——"

"But wherefore, Villebelle," interrupted the Viscount, "do you think that I am unhappy?"

"I know it," was the response given by the Marquis. "When I met you the other day in company with the Viscountess,—although we were only a brief ten minutes, together,—I nevertheless saw that you had moments of abstraction, and that your mind seemed to be wandering to other subjects far different from those which had arisen in conversation. After we separated, my wife observed to me that she thought you had something darkening your soul. To day, my dear Chateauf, I have observed the same manner on your part. My experiences of world have been somewhat severe; and its teachings have enabled me to catch at a glance the slightest evidences of unhappiness in those with whom I come in contact. Think not for a moment that I seek to penetrate, through mere impertinent curiosity, into your affairs: but there have been times in my life when I should have hailed the counsel and the solace of a true and sincere friend as something as welcome as an angel visit. I am your friend, Chateauf; and that is the reason I am thus speaking."

The Viscount bent down his eyes, and reflected profoundly for more than a minute. He was too intelligent not to be perfectly aware how very serious a step he had resolved to take, in renouncing his wife for the sake of Mrs. Chesterfield; and though very far from entertaining the idea of retracing his way, or revoking the preliminaries which he had that morning initiated with the notary,—yet it occurred to him that it was altogether a matter on which he really ought to consult friendly advice. The notary

himself had strongly urged him to adopt this course; and though Jules, in his infatuation for Augusta, had impatiently rejected the legal gentleman's counsel at the time,—it now recurred to him with added force, in consequence of the observations made by Villebelle.

"I do not know," he said, abruptly breaking silence, and raising his eyes suddenly, "that I am unhappy—In one sense I am the happiest of men——"

"You ought to be," said the Marquis. "You possess ample revenues—a fine position—a beautiful, amiable, and affectionate wife——But, ah! I hope that I have said nothing indiscreet?" he ejaculated, perceiving that a cloud came over the handsome countenance of the young Viscount.

"My dear friend," said the latter, taking the hand of the Marquis and pressing it with a sort of convulsive force, "you have indeed touched a true chord, though not in the manner you intended or supposed. I said that in one sense I was the happiest of men; and I meant that I am thus happy in possessing the love of one of the most adorable of women. But this, Villebelle," added the Viscount, lowering his voice, to a scarcely audible whisper,—"*this is not my wife!*"

The Marquis was amazed: for with all his experience of the world, and with all his penetration, he had failed to discern that the Viscountess de Chateauf possessed not her husband's love.

"Yes—it is as I tell you," continued the Viscount, having glanced around to assure himself that they were alone together in the conservatory. "My wife is as nothing to me: my mistress is everything. The former makes me wretched: the latter is the source of all happiness. Ah, my dear friend! you cannot read the real disposition of women by merely beholding them at the dinner-table, or in the midst of brilliant society. Doubtless I have my faults:—but who has not? Stephanie has however ten thousand times more failings than myself. Do not misunderstand me! The snow is not purer than her chastity as a wife; but I speak of infirmities of temper which are but too well calculated to make a household unhappy and drive a man to distraction. Regarded individually, each perhaps is an airy nothing; but aggravated—accumulated—taken together, they constitute an insupportable tyranny. One single drop of

er falling on the stone, makes no impression; but the constant dripping is it way. A single blow upon the head does little harm beyond the silent pain: but a continuous succession of blows produces madness. Thus with those infirmities of temper to which I have alluded: and now do you reprehend me?"

"I understand and I am astonished," said the Marquis of Villebelle. "I am not that I should have turned the conversation in a manner to evolve such a subject,—a topic invested with the solemnity of a family secret."

"Do not be sorry on that account, dear Villebelle," replied Chateaufort: "I am glad that you have thus seen. I do indeed require a friend, and am about to take a step of paramount importance—nothing less than separating from my wife!"

The Marquis of Villebelle looked deepened, as indeed, he was. He did not to ask the question whether the Viscountess was as yet aware of her husband's intention; for he felt assured she was not. He therefore expressed an illimitable compassion for the young lady, who was evidently lulled by the security of her own love, and the confidence of her own affection, and was suspicious of the storm which was brewing above her head. He was convinced, too, on account of his friend Jules Chateaufort: for he could not but see that it was indeed a fearful step he had resolved upon taking.

"Yes," continued the Viscount, "I am determined—unless indeed you can give me good reason to induce me to modify my resolve. A man is bound to do for his own happiness: he must not sacrifice it for the sake of one woman, if it can be ensured by another, though the former bear the more sacred name of wife, and the latter be in the false position of a mistress. Such is my case:—you therefore blame me. I shall not dishonourably in financial matters regard to Stephanie. Though none of my fortune is by deed settled upon her, I purpose to give her half; and a moiety of my own half shall I settle on the mistress. This is what I have decided the latter: and indeed, I have already instructed a lawyer to draw up the requisite papers."

"Jules de Chateaufort," said the Marquis of Villebelle, addressing his

friend in a solemn voice and with a grave countenance, "you have done well to consult me in this instance. You have brought yourself to the edge of a precipice: for God's sake, let mine be the hand which is to draw you back! You must reflect—this resolve which you have adopted in madness, must be renounced in the hour of sober deliberation. What! for some of those little peculiarities of temper which no women are without,—and which if we of the sterner sex study ourselves impartially, we shall find that we likewise possess,—will you on this account break up your home—perhaps deal your wife a death-blow—with the certainty of being yourself brought sooner or later to bitterest repentance?"

"Oh, my dear friend!" exclaimed the Viscount, "it is easy for you to talk thus—you, who are unacquainted with all the circumstances! I tell you that I cannot live with Stephanie. I never loved her: it was a marriage of expediency on my part: she brought me a fortune—I gave her a lofty title and a proud name in return;—on that score, therefore, we are equal. This very day has there occurred between us a scene which, had you beheld it——"

But he stopped suddenly short, conscience-stricken: for with almost overpowering effect did the sense of his own harshness and severity towards Stephanie, rush back to his mind. The Marquis of Villebelle comprehended in a moment wherefore his friend thus abruptly left off speaking; and his looks became graver still.

"Jules," he said, "you are conscious of faults on your own side. Now, I intend to speak plainly: it is my duty as your friend. Look you! I begin to understand your exact position. You have a mistress whom you love better than your wife; and you are seeking for every possible excuse and apology for abandoning the one so as to give yourself up entirely to the other. You are naturally magnanimous and generous; and a man with such a heart, cannot be without scruples when about to perform a bad action. Yes—do not be offended: I repeat, a bad action! And it is in order to tranquillise the qualms of your conscience that you seek to throw upon the head of your wife all the blame of the proceeding you purpose to adopt. Thus is it that you magnify her failings into faults; and

if needful, you would exaggerate her faults into crimes. Come, Jules, be reasonable!—you cannot shut out from yourself the conviction that I have spoken truly.”

“I confess, my dear Villebelle, that I am much struck by all you have said,” responded the Viscount, who was now pale and agitated: but then arose before him the image of the brilliantly handsome Augusta Chesterfield, and he hastened to observe, “Oh, if you saw her to whom my heart is devoted, you would admit that any sacrifice ought to be made for such a being! She is grandly beautiful—she is a wife too, who sacrifices husband, family, fame, and all that a woman can possibly hold dear—yes, of all will she make a sacrifice for me!”

“And you have informed her I think you said,” observed the Marquis, “of the nature and amount of the settlement you purpose to make in regard to her?”

“Oh, assuredly!” was Chateauneuf’s quick rejoinder. “She has given me so many proofs of her love, that I have been but too anxious to afford her the evidences of my own in return.”

“I see, my dear friend,” resumed the Marquis of Villebelle, “that you are under the spell of an infatuation. This you cannot help; we are but weak mortals—and I know what it is to love passionately and devotedly.”

“Your own wife?”

“Yes: and I am proud to confess it! And by the bye, loving my wife as I do—feeling that no possible temptation would render me unfaithful to her, much less that I myself could take the initiative in making overtures to any other woman—you will not be astonished or offended at the proposition I am about to lay before you, and which you can have no scruple or fear in accepting.”

“Speak, my dear friend: what is it?” said Jules.

“I will tell you. Permit me,” continued the Marquis, “to be introduced to this mistress of your’s. You can take me to her in my capacity of your best friend—one who has known you ever since you were eight years old—Will you do this?”

“I shall be proud and happy!” exclaimed the Viscount; “and then you will indeed admit that in renouncing my wife, I am consulting my own happiness by thus obtaining the opportunity of giving myself up

wholly and solely to her who has enthralled my heart. To-morrow at midday I will call for you at the hotel where you reside.”

“Be it so,” said the Marquis. “But perhaps it would be better, under all circumstances, that you should introduce me with some assumed name. There are considerations —”

“I understand full well,” interrupted the Viscount: “you occupy a prominent position in the world—and moreover you would not wish it to reach the ears of the Marchioness that you had visited a lady in such a false position as Mrs. Chesterfield—for that is the name of my mistress. Well then, you shall go under an *incognito*, and to-morrow at midday I will come for you.”

“And in the meantime,” said the Marquis, “you promise me, Jules, that you will not sign any paper—you will not breathe a word to the Viscountess of your intentions of separation—you will not compromise yourself in any way?”

“I faithfully promise,” rejoined Chateauneuf, “Indeed the documents themselves will not be in readiness for several days. Oh! I understand full well the friendly purpose you have in view. You intend to judge for yourself whether Mrs. Chesterfield——”

“She is an English lady, then?” interjected the Marquis.

“Yes, But, as I was observing, you intend to judge whether she is worthy of being preferred to Stephanie? Now, I am quite content to constitute you the tribunal of taste in this matter; and I will abide by your decision, on condition that you promise it shall be strictly impartial—justly and righteously deciding between the merits of the two ladies, without the least reference to the position of one as a wife, or to that of the other as a mistress. Do you, on your side, promise me this?”

“Most faithfully I do: and on the honour of a gentleman, will I give you my sentiments without bias and without prejudice. We will now continue the discourse no longer: let us return to the ladies—and to-morrow at midday I shall expect you.”

CHAPTER CII.

THE EXPERIMENT.

THE Marquis and Marchioness of Ville were staying at an hotel in the ionable quarter of the Place Vendôme: for inasmuch as their residence in Paris was but temporary, they had of course thought it worth their while to take a house for themselves, nor to furnished apartments. We must look into the room where they were seated at breakfast, on the morning of the party at the Viscount de Chateaufort's mansion. Constance was elegant *deshabille*, which set off her beauty to a most fascinating advantage. The Marquis was in handsome *robe de chambre*, confined at his waist with a sash, having large tassels at the ends. Despatches were lying upon the table addressed to "His Excellency the Duc de Villebelle, Minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of his Majesty King of Naples:"—but these were only to furnish him with some instructions which he was to send off to *l'Agence d'Affaires* in the Neapolitan capital, and not to abridge the leave of absence which he had obtained on his appointment to his new post.

"And so, my dear Constance," said the Marquis, "you are pleased with the attentions de Chateaufort?"

"Like her much," was the young woman's response; but I am afraid that not altogether happy; for there are moments when she wears a transient expression of sadness. And the Viscount here is decidedly something upon my mind——"

"I know it all, my dear Constance," replied the Marquis. "But do not trouble me now: I will tell you everything in the course of the afternoon; for I am going to try an experiment, which will only result—or, at least, I sincerely hope—in the restoration of the happiness of this young couple."

"I also sincerely hope Etienne, you will succeed. I had my misgivings last night, that they live not happily together. The courtesy of the Viscount displayed towards me, was somewhat forced: while on her hand she frequently threw glances at him, as if fearful that she might be committing herself in some manner, by an unguarded word or a gesture or a movement. Ah!

when I think of all the happiness which you and I enjoy, my beloved Etienne, I can deeply feel for other married couples who do not experience a similar amount of felicity. Stephanie de Chateaufort is a very sweet creature. I have formed quite an affection for her; and should be so rejoiced if you are enabled to report the success of the experiment to which you have alluded. Ah! when I bethink me, I yesterday sketched from memory the portrait of Stephanie——"

"And you had never seen her before the other day—and then only for ten minutes?" exclaimed the Marquis, laughing good-humouredly.

"Judge for yourself whether the outline is so very inaccurate. Of course, having been so many hours in her society last evening, I shall now be enabled to make my sketch more perfect. But meanwhile, tell me what you think of it."

Thus speaking, the beautiful Constance rose from her seat; and flitting across the room, raised a large portfolio from the sofa where it lay. She was bearing it to the breakfast-table, when the Marquis, with all the gallantry of a lover, sped after her and took the burthen from her hands—for which he received an affectionate look.

"Now let us see the sketch," he said, turning over the drawings in the portfolio. "I know you are a proficient in this beautiful art, my sweet Constance—— But really!" he ejaculated, as he took up the portrait alluded to, and which was only just commenced; "this is indeed striking! You have caught the expression to a nicety: all the outlines are perfect: there is not a single correction to make! You have nothing to do but to put in your shading—and the work will be admirable."

The countenance of the Marchioness showed how delightful were her husband's praises; and threw upon her a glance of fondest affection. Oh! how different was this breakfast-table scene from that which took place on the previous day at the Viscount de Chateaufort's mansion, and which we have described in another chapter!

"Why, what have we here?" ejaculated the Marquis, as he turned over the drawings: "something that I never saw before! You naughty creature, how was it that you did not show me this?"

"I intended," replied Constance, blushing and smiling; "but I did not

like to do so. The truth is, I thought that I had made myself too coy and sentimental——”

“No, dearest—this was indeed the way you often looked,” exclaimed the enraptured Marquis, “when we were wont to meet in the garden of Saxon-dale House. Ah! often and often too, has there been such a scene as this—Mary Anne rushing towards us to give us due warning that your mother had just returned home from an airing in the carriage! It is life-like: the whole scene is perfection——No, there is a fault! You have flattered me too much.”

“Say rather, my dear Etienne, that I have flattered myself.”

“That is impossible, Constance!” exclaimed the Marquis: “you could not do so. Ah! though I am your husband, I am still your lover likewise—and more inclined than ever, perhaps, to be so, now that I am reminded by this picture of the days of our courtship. Oh! that was a period of pleasing pain—hope mingled with fear—delicious interviews enjoyed by stealth, and with the constant apprehension that they would be interrupted!”

A few words will suffice to afford an idea of the pencil-sketch which Constance had thus made, and which the Marquis of Villebelle had so unexpectedly lighted upon in the portfolio. It represented herself and him seated together in a garden,—she looking somewhat coy and sentimental, as she had observed—he evidently in the attitude of one who was breathing the language of love in the ear of his adored one. At a little distance Mary Anne, the faithful lady's maid—who, by the bye, was still in the service of Constance, appeared in the background, hastening forward with alarm depicted on her countenance, to warn the lovers that their stolen interview must not be prolonged.

“Yes—those were indeed days of pleasing pain,” said Constance: and she hastily passed her kerchief across her countenance: for the retrospect had conjured up certain associations with regard to her mother, her brother, and her sister.

“Do not weep, my beloved wife,” said the Marquis, drawing his chair closer to that in which she was seated; and taking her hand he pressed it warmly—while he gazed with tender devotion upon the countenance over which the shade of sadness had come. “No

happiness can be perfect, Constance, in this world. There are always some drawbacks; and we must accept with gratitude the amount of felicity which we do experience. Only conceive how infinitely superior is our condition, to that of a wedded couple who enjoy not each other's love, and know not therefore the charms of sweetest domesticity!”

“Yes—I am not unmindful of all that,” answered Constance, thanking her husband with an affectionate look for the attempt which he thus made to console and cheer her. “Nevertheless, you must admit, Etienne, that it would indicate hardness of heart if I did not feel the calamities which have overtaken my family. My mother disgraced—her name become a bye-word in the society which she once adorned—convicted of having propagated a serious calumny in respect to Mr. Deveril;—Edmund having made such a shocking match;—Juliana I know not where—but she, alas! disgraced likewise——Oh, Etienne! promise me, promise me, my beloved husband, that if ever you obtain the slightest hint as to where my unhappy sister has secreted herself you will tell me—that I may fly to her—that I may console her! For I am sure that whatever her faults may have been, you would not debar me from the performance of such a duty?”

“No, dearest Constance—not for a moment would I!” exclaimed the Marquis; “and you will not even require my solemn promise that if accident should render me acquainted with the seclusion to which your unfortunate sister has fled, I would not lose moment in revealing it to you.”

“A word from your lips, dearest Etienne,” responded Constance, “has ever the sanctity of the most solemn vow. Yes—I know that you would not for an instant hesitate to let me see my sister, if you by any chance obtained tidings concerning her. But we will now talk on other subjects: I must not be sad and gloomy when in your society.”

“No,” rejoined the Marquis: “because my happiness depends upon your's. And now, Constance. I have to inform you that at twelve o'clock I am going somewhere with the Viscount de Chateaufort. It is to carry out that experiment to which I have alluded. I shall tell you nothing more now: have patience, my beloved one, until

ny return. You need not fear that I shall be very long absent."

But in the meanwhile, let us see what the Viscount de Chateaufort was doing elsewhere. This young nobleman was much struck by the remarks and remonstrances of his friend Villebelle at the time the discourse was taking place in the conservatory: but when he awoke in the morning, the effect thereof was much deadened. We cannot say that it had altogether passed away,—because the Viscount de Chateaufort was too intelligent and likewise possessed of feelings natural too good, not to have experienced, even after the lapse of some hours the lingering influence of Villebelle's impressive language. But he was still as much infatuated as ever with Augusta Chesterfield: her image, which was uppermost in his mind, was full of a ravishing beauty; and he said to himself that such a woman was worth making any sacrifice for. Nevertheless, he preserved a certain degree of kindness of manner towards Stephanie at the breakfast-table; and he studiously avoided taking notice at anything which she said. He moreover faithfully kept the promise which he had given to the Marquis of Villebelle, and hinted not a single syllable of the intentions which he harboured in respect to a separation. The Viscount, finding him more gentle towards her more lenient—more tolerant—secretly cherished herself that a favourable change had taken place within him; and she had no opportunity of lavishing upon the evidences of her sincere love. And during the ordinary routine of the breakfast table and the accompanying conversation, there are a myriad little things by which a fond and adoring man can display her tenderness for his beloved one: looks, and words, and actions, all may be rendered available for his purpose. And so it was with the Countess on the present occasion; more than once Jules de Chateaufort was compelled to admit to himself that the affection his wife cherished for him was deep, tender, and sincere.

It was about half-past ten o'clock when he issued forth from his mansion for the accustomed visit to Augusta; he set out thus early, according to the promise made her on the preceding day. On reaching the little villa, he found Mrs. Chesterfield expecting him; and she welcomed him with the usual amount of blandishments,

caresses, and smiles,—all lavishly given and rapturously received. Again did he seek in his own mind to contrast the fervid endearments of Augusta with the mere ingenuous and unsophisticated evidences of his wife's affection: but the comparison he drew was favourable to the former. He sought to persuade himself that there was something insipid and mawkishly sentimental in the love of Stephanie—while the ardent caresses of his mistress filled his soul with an almost frenzied passion. It was a complete infatuation under which he laboured in respect to Mrs. Chesterfield: it was a devouring, furious storm like whirl of passion, through which, by her blandishments and the gorgeous splendour of her voluptuous beauty, she had the power to hurry him.

"Dearest Augusta," he said, in the course of conversation, "I have a great favour to ask you"

"There is no favour, beloved Jules, that you can demand at my hands," responded the syren, "which I am not prepared to grant. Name it. Is it some new proof of my devoted love which you require?"

"No—scarcely that," answered the Viscount. "I will explain myself in a few words. Yesterday I met a friend, a certain M. Meurice, who was a schoolfellow of mine—a gentleman of wealth and standing; and he dined with me last evening. Remember, Augusta, he is one of my oldest acquaintances: and we entertain a very sincere friendship for each other. I sought an opportunity to speak to him alone, of old reminiscences—those school-boy days which it is sometimes so pleasant to look back upon; and the discourse, by a natural transition, turned upon the present circumstances of each of us. Your image was uppermost in my mind: I longed to eulogize you to my friend. I could not resist the opportunity: my heart was so full of love and devotion for you that it needed a vent for its feelings. Besides, it is so sweet to confide to the ear of friendship all that one experiences in respect to so strong a passion. M. Meurice was rejoiced to hear that I am so blessed in your love: he is no straight-laced, sanctimonious individual who would take the wife's part and chide the faithless husband. In short, he entered into all my feelings: for he likewise has loved passionately and fondly; and he could appreciate

the gushing enthusiasm with which I spoke. Now, dearest Augusta, the favour I ask at your hands, is that you will permit me to introduce my friend to you presently."

"I cannot," she answered, "have the slightest objection after the arrangements which were solemnly entered into between us yesterday. Had not those arrangements been made, I should chide you, Jules, for the proposal to present any one who might hereafter meet me with my husband and make me blush at the recognition. But inasmuch as it is agreed that I am to renounce my husband——"

"Yes—for my sake," quickly responded the enamoured Viscount. "In a few days all will be settled; and there can consequently be no harm in your receiving this bosom-friend of mine."

"Assuredly not," rejoined Mrs. Chatterfield. "Any friend of your's, Jules, will ever be most welcome to me."

"And you will apparel yourself, dearest," whispered the Viscount, tenderly and coaxingly, "in your most becoming dress: for though you are lovely and adorable in any garb, yet would I have you set off your splendid charms to the utmost advantage, that you may in every way shine so as to justify my taste in the eyes of my friend."

"Fear not, Jules," answered Augusta: "my appearance will be worthy of your love."

"I must now leave you therefore," added the Viscount: "for I have promised to fetch M. Maurice at mid-day. He is staying at an hotel in Paris: and by one o'clock at latest we shall be with you."

Jules de Chateaufort embraced his mistress tenderly—and issued forth from the villa. In order to keep his amour hitherto as secret as possible, he had never used his own carriage, nor been attended on horseback by any one of his grooms, on the occasion of his visits to the villa; and therefore he was now compelled to take a public vehicle to proceed to Paris—which however was only about a couple or three miles distant. He reached the hotel where the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle were staying, precisely at mid-day; and having paid his respects to Constance, he took her husband, who was in readiness, away with him. He could not help noticing that when the Marquis left his wife—though it was only for a few hours—he embraced her

and the spectacle of this connubial bliss caused a pang of remorse to shoot through the heart of the young Viscount. He even sighed; and the sound fell not unnoticed upon the ear of his friend, who was secretly rejoiced at this proof that all the better feelings of the Viscount's soul were not completely deadened within him.

"You doubtless consider me uxorious to a degree?" observed the Marquis, as he took his seat by the side of the Viscount in the hackney-coach, which immediately rolled away from the hotel. "But I assured you last night that I regard my wife with the tenderest and sincerest affection."

"And may you always be happy in this love of your's," observed Jules: but afraid that his friend would seize the opportunity to lecture him on his conduct in respect to Stephanie, he hastened to give the conversation a dexterous turn, by observing, "If I mistake not, you told me last night that the Marchioness is the daughter of an English peeress named Lady Saxondale? I was not struck by the name at the time: but after you were gone, I bethought myself that it was not altogether unfamiliar to me. Is there not a nobleman of that name?"

"There is," answered Villebelle, in a very serious manner. "He is my wife's brother; and I regret to say that he has contracted a most foolish alliance——"

"Ah, I remember!" ejaculated the Viscount. "The Baroness de Charlemont! Pardon me for having touched upon a topic which can be by no means agreeable——"

"There is no need for apology, my dear friend," interrupted the Marquis. "It is a circumstance which I deplore on the part of one so nearly connected with my beloved wife: but it is not a topic to be avoided in shame on my own account."

"Assuredly not," responded Chateaufort. "How was it possible that Lord Saxondale could have made such a match?"

"Doubtless he became infatuated with that artful and designing woman," responded Villebelle. "Ah, Jules! there are women of this kind in the world—women who insidiously weave their chains of silk and gold around the too susceptible heart——"

"True! there are such women," exclaimed the Viscount, again solicitous

vert the conversation into another
nel: for he more than half-suspect-
at Villebelle was applying these
ks to his case in respect to August-
And are this Lord Saxondale and
archioness your wife, the only
en of her ladyship?"

"—there is another son, elder
," replied Villebelle.

"Is she too married?" asked the Vis-
, merely for the purpose of keeping
onversation away from topics which
disagreeable to himself, although
t convinced that when once Ville-
should have seen his Augusta, he
no longer give utterance to covert
does relative to artful and design-
omen.

or Juliana Fairfield—for that is
me of my wife's sister who is un-
d," returned Villebelle. But, by
e, have you devised some *incognito*
to adopt?"

us. You are to pass as M. Maurice;
furthermore, I have given An-
," continued Jules, "a most ex-
t character in respect to the libe-
of your sentiments. I have assur-
r that in you she will find no
altered, demure, sanctimonious
dual;—and therefore, my dear
elle, you will be upon your guard
ingly."

ar not, Jules," rejoined the Mar-
that I shall in any way deport
I so as to make you regret having
ed to my caprice in presenting me
Chesterfield. Whatever opinion I
orm, will be in no way shadowed
ntil you and I are alone together

vehicle rolled onward; and in due
stopped at the gate of the grounds
ch the little villa stood. In her
apartment within the walls of
illa, Mrs. Chesterfield was placed
d reclining attitude upon the sofa.
d apparelled herself in her hand-
morning dress; and it was one
admirably became the style of her
beauty, she had taken immense
with her toilet. She knew that the
a of the Viscount would be sus-
and enhanced by any encomia
his friend might pass upon her
; and she therefore had not failed
der herself as captivating as possi-
he dress, fitting tight to the bust,
ped its rich contours,—though the
orange of a morning-garb concealed
She wore her hair in bands; and
natural gloss rested upon those

luxuriant masses. Her very attitude
upon the sofa was studied,—a mirror op-
posite showing her that the position she
had thus chosen was well suited to her
purpose. When, therefore, she heard the
vehicle stop and the gate-bell ring, she
did not rise from that sofa: nor, as the
sounds of footsteps, approaching the
front-door from the gate, reached her
curiosity as to jump up and peep from
the window to see what sort of a person
her lover's friend might be. No: she re-
tained her half reclining position upon
the sofa,—one well-shaped foot resting
upon a hassock, and her face ready to
be turned towards the door when it
opened, so that the light from the case-
ment might fall upon her features and
display the aquiline beauty of her
profile. She was resolved to please the
Viscount's friend; and as this endeavour
on the part of a woman is always at-
tended with more or less excitement,
it brought up a richer carnation tint to
the delicate olive of Augusta's com-
plexion. Another glance at the mirror
was completely satisfactory; and now
footsteps were ascending the stairs.

The door opened; the Viscount
entered first and he began with the
proper formula for such occasions:—
"Permit me to introduce——"

But he was suddenly cut short: for as
the Marquis of Villebelle, immediately
following, crossed the threshold, he
exclaimed, "Juliana!"—and then stop-
ped in utter amazement.

Jules de Chateaufneuf started on hear-
ing that name—the name of the Mar-
chioness of Villebelle's sister—the name
of one, too, who the Marquis himself had
during the ride assured him was un-
married!

CHAPTER CLII.

THE EXPERIMENT'S RESULT.

"Yes: Augusta Chesterfield was none
other than Juliana, Lady Saxondale's
elder daughter! As the reader may sup-
pose, she was seized with a perfect con-
sternation on beholding her brother-in-
law; and the thought flashed to her
mind that in introducing him to her, it
was a premeditated stratagem on the
part of the Viscount to have her
thoroughly unmasked and exposed. And
this supposition was natural enough, in-
asmuch as Jules had assured her that
the individual about to be presented
bore the name of *Maurice*. The carna-

tion tint was in a moment heightened into the deepest red on Juliana's countenance: but not a syllable—not even the slightest ejaculation—escaped her lips: she was stricken dumb by the overpowering sense of shame, astonishment, confusion, and even rage.

"Juliana!" cried the Viscount de Chateaufort, repeating the name which had burst from the lips of the Marquis: "what is the meaning of this? Tell me, Villebelle—is it your sister-in-law?"

Then the Hon. Miss Farefield instantaneously perceived that it was no trick on her lover's part—merely some coincidence which she could not however fathom, nor had leisure to reflect upon. Starting up from the sofa, she advanced towards the Viscount,—at the same time flinging a swift but significant glance upon Villebelle, as much as to enjoin him to betray her no farther than he had already done.

"Yes, dearest Jules," she said, taking his hand, and gazing up into his countenance with all her power of fondest cajolery; "my name is indeed Juliana, and not Augusta: but in no other circumstances am I changed. The adoption of that other name was a whim and a caprice—But why do you look thus coldly upon me?"

Jules de Chateaufort, however, made no answer. An expression of anguish passed over his countenance: and turning abruptly aside, he pressed his hand to his brow, as if to steady his thoughts. The horrible idea was agitating in his mind that he was the victim and the dupe of a designing woman, and that Villebelle's ominously uttered words had become justified in their predictive reality. For all in a moment the thought had occurred to the young Viscount, that if this were Juliana Farefield—and she *unmarried*—the child that she bore in her bosom was the fruit of an illicit amour; she must therefore be a wanton, and she had sought the retirement of this villa to conceal her shame! If she had been another's with the sanctified title of a wife it was nothing in his estimation: but if she had been another's without that title, then was she instantaneously converted into a licentious profligate—a being of gross impurity!

"For heaven's sake ruin me not with *him*!" were the hastily whispered words which Juliana breathed aside to the Marquis of Villebelle, the instant that the Viscount so abruptly turned away from her.

"Juliana," responded her brother-in-law, but also speaking in a subdued and rapid manner: "I dare not mislead my friend on any account. It would be death of his wife!"

"Etienne, I implore you," murmured Juliana, ready to sink with shame and anguish, "save me from exposure! Remember that I always favoured your suit with my sister—"

"It cuts me to the very soul to harm a hair of your head—for Constance's sake," rejoined the Marquis. "But what am I to do?"

"Villebelle!" exclaimed the Viscount de Chateaufort, suddenly turning round at this juncture and clutching his friend by the arm—for it was evident that the young nobleman was labouring under the most painful excitement; "tell me, wherefore has your sister-in-law sought this retirement. She is in a way to become a mother: has she a husband? does he hold an Indian appointment? Tell me everything, I conjure you!"

The Marquis of Villebelle's countenance became so over-shadowed with gloom, and he looked so deeply afflicted, that the Viscount de Chateaufort had no need to have his questions answered in words. He read the responses on his friend's features; and they were damning of the woman who until within the last few minutes had exercised such a fascinating power and spell-like influence over him.

"Juliana," he said, in a low and profoundly mournful voice, "I will not reproach you. I awake from a dream: but it was a dream which was delightful while it lasted—and I have to thank you for so much bliss. Happy is he who enjoys the fragrance of a flower in the ignorance that its leaves may distil poison! No: I will not reproach you! But all is an end between us!"

"No, no!" shrieked forth Juliana. "Speak not these harsh words! It is a death-blow which you are dealing! I love you, Jules! On my soul I love you!—Heavens, he deserts me!"

The Viscount de Chateaufort rushed precipitately from the room, in so excited a manner that he waited not even to speak another word to his friend Villebelle: nor did he pause upon the stairs to see whether the nobleman was following him. Juliana flew to the window: the Viscount was speeding towards the gate—Oh, for one look!—that she might catch him

eyes—that she might passionately wave him back! But no: he turned not his regards upon her, even for a single moment!—the gate opened—he rushed through—it closed behind him: she beheld him no more!

But let not the reader fancy that Juliana really loved the Viscount with a true sincerity of passion. No such thing. She had merely been playing a deep game, in order to secure to herself a lover and a fortune,—inasmuch as she was disgraced beyond the hope of obtaining a husband, and was moreover dependant in a pecuniary sense upon her mother's purse. If she exhibited so much anguish, it was not altogether feigned: on the contrary, it was almost entirely genuine,—but not an anguish on account of a lost love; it was the anguish of disappointment and rage of finding all the fabric of her hopes thus dissipated in a single instant. Such an anguish as this lasted only so long as there was the slightest chance of bringing her victim back and regaining her empire over him: but when the garden-gate shut him out from her view, and she saw that all was lost, she grew suddenly calm.

"Etienne," she said, turning abruptly round and flinging her flashing glances at her brother-in-law, "it is you that have done this!"

"Not intentionally, Julianal—on my soul, not intentionally!" he answered, while his looks still continued to indicate the deepest commiseration and sorrow. "Listen for a few moments while I explain——"

"There is nothing to explain," cried Juliana petulantly: "the mischief is done—you have ruined me!"

"There must be explanation," said the Marquis, "because there is accusation. I tell you, Juliana, that all this has been perfectly unintentional on my part—and that when I came hither, I had not the slightest notion of encountering you, I could not have foreseen it!"

"But wherefore," demanded Miss Farefield, "that feigned name of Meurice?"

"That feigned name of Meurice—I will explain the incident," responded the Marquis, serious and mournful alike in his tone and looks. "But be patient, Juliana—give not way to these impetuous gestures—these angry looks. The Viscount de Chateaufort spoke to me, last night, in enthusiastic terms of a lady

who had won his heart; and after some discourse it was agreed that I should be presented to her this day. Now, you can well understand that holding a high official appointment—and for the sake of Constance likewise——"

"Oh, I comprehend!" interrupted Juliana with bitterness: "you did not choose to come under your own name to pay a visit to a kept mistress! Well," she continued, in a somewhat milder manner, it is at all events satisfactory to know that this was not a vile trick nor a detestable stratagem, planned for my exposure."

"No!" ejaculated Villebelle: "I would not for the world aggravate whatsoever sorrows and afflictions you may have already endured! But wherefore have you kept your dwelling a secret from Constance? You must have known she was in Paris: you must have known likewise that she loves you—that she has yearned after you——"

"Etienne," interrupted Juliana vehemently, "is it not but too evident that my pathway and that of my sister lie in different directions on the broad arena of the world? You must not think that I am altogether so changed—so altered—so degraded," she added, her voice suddenly sinking as she spoke the word; and the word itself being spoken with a painful effort—"as to be indifferent to what may be thought of me, or to be enabled to look those who know and love me, in the face without a blush. Etienne, I am unhappy: my fortunes too are desperate. You know what has happened in England: Constance likewise knows it:—and could you think I should voluntarily seek you out? No: I should only be bringing disgrace upon my sister; and I am not bad enough to do that. Being compelled to renounce the idea of obtaining a husband—But no matter! Let this interview end. Leave me!"

"But you will see Constance?" urged the Marquis. "It was only a few hours back that she was speaking of you with tears in her eyes; and she made me promise that if by any accident I should discover the place of your abode——"

"Then let Constance come to me this evening," said Juliana. "A few hours must elapse before we meet, that I may have leisure to compose my troubled thoughts. Do not let her come until the evening. And now leave me, Etienne."

"I go, Juliana," said the Marquis: but still lingering, he added in a hesitating manner, as if fearful of offending one whose temper was naturally vehement, and now particularly ruffled,—*"Is there nothing I can do for you? Tell me, Juliana—my purse is at your service —"*

"Thank you—I have sufficient means for the present. My mother supplies me with funds. Ah! Etienne," she added bitterly, "with what a family have you connected yourself!—my mother's reputation itself damaged—my brother married to a murderess—myself——"

"Juliana, give not way to these reflections—at least not in such a spirit," interrupted the Marquis, deeply pained. "It is not impossible for you to experience happiness in this world. In some agreeable seclusion, and under a feigned name——"

"Enough. Leave me to chalk out my own career—to follow my own destinies! And now go, Etienne: I must be alone."

Villebelle extended his hand, which Juliana took for a moment: and as she turned abruptly away, he slowly quitted the room. On issuing forth from the villa, he found the hackney-coach still waiting in the road.

"Where is the gentleman who accompanied me?" he asked of the driver.

"Gone, sir," was the response. "He came out and rushed away like one demented."

Villebelle reflected for a few moments. He thought to himself that Jules de Chateaufneuf, in a thoroughly altered state of mind, must have sped homeward to make his peace fully with his amiable and loving wife: but he longed to proceed to the mansion to assure himself that such was the fact. On the other hand, he was anxious to inform Constance that he had discovered the abode of her sister, whom she was to see in the evening: but then he reasoned that as some hours must yet elapse ere this interview could take place, Constance in the meantime would be full of anxiety and suspense, and would be asking him a thousand questions, to which he might not be able to give very satisfactory replies: for he was resolved to screen Juliana's most recent faults and frailties—those in respect to Chateaufneuf—as possible from the Marchioness. He therefore came to the conclusion that it would be better to remain some little time

absent from the hotel; and in the interval he could visit the hackney-coach, and ordered the driver to take him to the Viscount's mansion.

In a short time the Marquis of Villebelle alighted at that paternal residence; and, on inquiring of the hall-porter for the Viscount, was informed that he was in the drawing-room with the Viscountess. Villebelle's heart warmed at this intelligence, which served to confirm his previously conceived hope that the husband would now do his duty towards the tender and affectionate Stephanie. He ascended to the apartment, to which a handsomely dressed laquay led the way; and the instant the door was thrown open, he observed the Viscount and Viscountess seated together upon the sofa. The glance that Jules immediately flung upon him, was expressive of mingled gratitude and firmly-taken resolve,—gratitude for the part which the Marquis of Villebelle had so generously borne in the transaction, and a resolve that thenceforth he would profit by recent experiences. As a matter of course, Villebelle assumed the air of one who was merely paying an ordinary visit, and came for no special purpose; because he naturally concluded that the Viscount had not explained to his wife a single detail of the circumstances which had thus induced him to seek her presence at a time when he was wont to be absent from her. The Marquis saw that Stephanie was completely happy, and during half-an-hour's conversation, he likewise perceived that the Viscount treated her with a kindness which was truly affectionate, without being so overstrained as to excite her suspicion that it was the result of no ordinary occurrences. When Villebelle rose to take his departure, Jules de Chateaufneuf accompanied him from the room; and leading him into another, embraced him with the most grateful warmth.

"Through you, Villebelle," exclaimed Jules, "I have been wakened from the most delusive of dreams. Your's indeed is the hand which has snatched me back from the brink of a precipice!—you have saved me from consummating towards my wife an outrage which I should full soon have been compelled bitterly to repent. Ah! when I ere now broke away from the

presence of that guileful syren, it was with a sudden springing up of the tenderest yearning towards Stephanie. All her good qualities seemed to crowd in upon my convictions in a moment: they blazed as it were upon my mental view—they made me comprehend what a treasure I possessed in her, and how infamously I had been about to sacrifice her!"

"My dear friend," answered Villebelle, "you know not the pleasure it affords me in hearing you thus speak. Ah! Jules, it would have indeed been something to be deeply deplored, if a noble heart such as your's naturally is, had been ruined by an infatuation."

"I am an altered man," replied the Count: "a veil has fallen from my eyes—and in the same moment that the character of one woman was exposed in its darkness, that of another was revealed in its brightness. Yes—I am an altered man; and perhaps it is fortunate that all this should have taken place. Hitherto I had not loved Stephanie—now I feel that I can adore her: hitherto her demonstrations of tenderness had appeared to me insipid and of school-girl mawkishness—henceforth they will constitute the greatest charms of my existence. Oh! I feel, my dear friend, that there are moments in a man's life when it requires some startling incident to arouse him into a due appreciation of what is good, and what is virtuous, and what is beautiful—at the same time that he is snatched from the midst of delusions, falsities, and artificialities. To you am I indebted for all that has occurred; and rest assured, Villebelle, that whensoever you set foot within these walls, you will henceforth be enabled to contemplate a scene of conjugal bliss as perfect as that which you yourself enjoy."

The two noblemen were melted to tears: they grasped each other's hands—Jules with the fervour of gratitude, Etienne in the warmth of congratulation: and thus for the present did they separate. The Marquis of Villebelle, re-entering the hackney-coach, was driven back to Paris; and on ascending to his apartments in the hotel, he found Constance awaiting his return. She was employing her leisure in finishing the portrait of Stephanie; and her husband, immediately perceiving in what work she had been engaged, as she threw down her pencil on his appearance, embraced her,—saying, "When that portrait is finished,

Constance, you shall send it to my friend Jules, who will appreciate it as that of a wife whom he has at last been brought to understand and to love."

"When your experiment has succeeded, Etienne!" exclaimed the delighted young lady; "and I am rejoiced on Stephanie's account—yes, and on that of her husband likewise. But sit down, and give me the promised explanations."

"A few words will suffice," responded the Marquis. "Last evening, Jules made certain confessions to me, by which, I found that he had become infatuated by the syren charms of another. From all that he said, I felt convinced he was in the power of a designing woman; and you will not be angry with me, Constance, when I state that in order to save my friend, I was resolved to see this female—inasmuch as I knew that I could judge of her without the bias which sat like a spell on the mind of the Viscount. It was arranged that he should introduce me to her to-day. It has been done; and the result is the complete severance of the two—the breaking off of a connexion which so nearly proved fatal to his happiness—and the opening of his eyes to the full understanding of his wife's affectionate disposition. You are not angry, dearest Constance—"

"Angry, Etienne!" she exclaimed eagerly and half reproachfully: "how can I be angry with you? You have acted as a friend to a friend; and by *this* do I signify my approval:"—at the same time imprinting a kiss upon his cheek.

"And now dearest Constance," said the Marquis, "I have to speak to you on a matter altogether different—and—and—totally unconnected with the other topic. You remember the solemn promise——"

"Juliana!" exclaimed Constance: "you have met her?"

"Accident has revealed to me her abode——"

"And you have seen her" cried the younger sister vehemently.

"Yes—I have seen her—and I have promised that you also shall see her."

"At once!" cried the Marchioness, starting up from her seat by her husband's side: "let me hasten at once to embrace Juliana!"

"Calm yourself," said the Marquis: "it is not until the evening that you are to call upon her."

"And why not? wherefore this

delay?" exclaimed Constance, cruelly disappointed.

"It is her wish. She was overpowered at the thought of meeting you again, under altered circumstances——"

"And tell me Etienne—is she happy? But no—she cannot be—it is impossible——Alas, my poor sister!"

Constance burst into tears; and Villebelle did all he could to console her. He had dreaded lest it should strike her that Juliana was the syren of whom he had spoken as the beguiler of Jules de Chateauneuf; and he was happy to perceive that his wife entertained not this suspicion. No: for Constance would have thought, if the idea had struck her at all, that her husband could scarcely have been so guarded; and that by some look or word, he would have betrayed the fact of that identity. Her impression therefore was that it was a mere coincidence, his having fallen in with Juliana at the same time he was bent on his generous purpose on behalf of Chateauneuf.

It was about six o'clock in the evening that the Marquis and Marchioness proceeded in a carriage to the village of Auteuil. It was not Villebelle's intention to accompany Constance into Juliana's presence: he thought that the two sisters would rather be alone at such an interview. He therefore intimated to his wife that he purposed to remain for her in the carriage,—at the same time giving her to understand that she need not abridge her visit to Juliana on that account.

The vehicle stopped at the gate of the villa: the bell was rung—and Madame Durand herself came forth. She had evidently received her instructions from Juliana: for in answer to the inquiry of the Marquis, she immediately said, "The lady is gone: she departed two or three hours back."

"Gone!" ejaculated Constance, in a tone of anguish. But she has left some letter—some message——"

"Yes—this letter," answered Madame Durand, presenting a sealed note at the same time.

Constance tore it open; and by the light of the lamp at the gateway, she read the following:—

"Do not be angry with me, dearest sister, that I have resolved not to meet you at present. The circumstances under which we should thus encounter each other would be too painful for me. Mistrust not however the love that I bear for you:—and may you be happy!

I go into some other seclusion, afar from Paris—and whence in a short time will write to you. By the date at which you will reach Naples—as I see by the newspapers when you are likely to be there—you shall find a letter awaiting you. Farewell, dearest sister; and remember me kindly to the Marquis.

"JULIANA."

It was with sad and mournful feeling that Constance accompanied her husband back to the hotel at Paris: but probably his impression was that under all circumstances it was better Juliana should have adopted such a course.

CHAPTER CLIII.

THE PURSUER AND THE FUGITIVES.

THREE weeks had now elapsed since the liberation of Lord Saxondale from Dr. Ferney's house in Conduit Street, Hanover Square. The physician, on discovering the flight of the young nobleman at an early hour on the ensuing morning, had sped off to Saxondale House to acquaint her ladyship with the circumstance, and to assure her that he himself was perfectly innocent of any complicity in the matter. Lady Saxondale was at first stupefied; for she saw at a glance what an immense advantage the incident would give her daughter-in-law Adelaide, in case Edmund should return to his wife and in all things make common cause with her. Her ladyship did not reproach Dr. Ferney: she knew his character too well not to be at once convinced that he gave her the right version of Edmund's escape,—the evidence being that it was effected by some person or persons entering the house in the night. But even without such evidence, Lady Saxondale was well aware that the physician would not deceive her—and that if even altering his mind, and refusing any longer to keep Edmund a prisoner, he would deal candidly with her.

That the Count de St. Gerard had by some means succeeded in tracing out the place to which Edmund was removed, and that through this young nobleman's intervention her son had been rescued from confinement, Lady Saxondale did not doubt. But little it mattered by whom or by what means the release was effected, since the mischief was done, and Lady Saxondale was not the woman

to lose valuable time in speculations on that point, nor in vain regrets when some positive mode of action was required. For if the reader will bear in mind those explanations which were given at the time when Lady Saxondale and her daughter-in-law were first brought together, it will speedily become evident that the fact of Edmund being at liberty, materially altered all her ladyship's plans, and placed her in a more perilous position than ever. She could not now institute a suit in the Ecclesiastical Courts for the annulments of her son's marriage with the Baroness de Charlemont,—inasmuch as by obtaining from the guardians a written guarantee to allow Adelaide two thousand a-year, and by assigning to her the castle in Lincolnshire as her abiding-place, a virtual recognition of that alliance had been given. What, therefore, was Lady Saxondale's position? Just this:—that in about a year and a half Edmund would come of age—she would be reduced to a mere cypher, having no farther control over the immense revenues of the house of Saxondale—having no right even unless with his permission, to set foot across the threshold of either the mansion in Park Lane or the Lincolnshire country-seat—reduced to a jointure of some three thousand a-year—and what would be worse than all compelled to behold her daughter-in-law Adelaide, whom she hated, occupying the high place which she herself had so long enjoyed! This was the position to which Lady Saxondale would find herself reduced,—unless by fresh machinations she could contrive to get her son Edmund completely into her power, and obtain the fullest and completest influence over him.

"All these matters were duly weighed and considered by Lady Saxondale immediately on receiving the intelligence of her son's escape: or rather we should say, so soon afterwards as she could compose herself for such serious and painful meditation. But it was not very long ere her ladyship became sufficiently tranquillized to envisage her position calmly; and her resolves were speedily taken.

She sent at once for Lord Harold Staunton, and addressed him in the following manner;—

"Edmund has escaped: it is of the utmost consequence that he should be again got into my power. For this purpose I am about to leave London. Do you on your part lose no time in getting that woman Madge Somers away

from Deveril's house. You and I, Harold, have now each to play a part upon which much depends; you must not sleep over your work, as I assuredly shall not be caught slumbering at mine. My belief is that Edmund has gone to rejoin his wife, who is in Lincolnshire. Thither shall I proceed under circumstances of becoming caution: but if it be necessary, I will write to you. At all events lose no time in carrying out that which you have undertaken to perform; and if it should transpire that Edmund has remained in London, and accident should throw him in your way, do your best to renew all your former intimacy with him—worm yourself into his confidence—make yourself necessary to him,—you know how to do it,—and then we shall determine what future measures to adopt."

Lord Harold Staunton,—who was once again entirely enmeshed in the trammels which his own self-interest as well as his passion for Lady Saxondale wove around him,—promised full compliance with her injunctions; and assured her that so soon as his arrangements could be accomplished, he would make the attempt to get Madge Somers away from Deveril's house. Lady Saxondale then set off privately into Lincolnshire,—travelling by a postchaise without any attendants, and under an assumed name. On her arrival in the county where the castle was situated, she would not go to Gainsborough, as she was too well known there; and she calculated that if Edmund had really rejoined his wife at the castle, they would both be upon the alert and would not fail to take measures for obtaining prompt information in case new dangers should threaten. Therefore Lady Saxondale went to Lincoln; and thence she despatched a person to make inquiries privately and cautiously in the neighbourhood of the castle to ascertain whether Edmund and Adelaide were residents there. The emissary returned to Lincoln, with the intelligence that Lord Saxondale had been to the castle—that he only stayed there an hour or two—and then departed with his wife. They were attended only by Adelaide's own maid; and no one at the castle knew whither they had gone.

Lady Saxondale was much annoyed at these tidings: for she had no great difficulty in fathoming the plans of

her son and her daughter-in-law and she knew that however silly and thoughtless he might be, his wife was an astute and cunning creature, who would give him the best counsel and adopt the most fitting measures to enable him to baffle any fresh designs against his liberty.

"Doubtless," said Lady Saxondale to herself, "they will seek some profound seclusion, where they hope to remain undiscovered and unmolested until Edmund shall be of age and then become his own master. Perhaps they may go upon the Continent?—and that will render matters all the more difficult for me to disentangle. But I am not to be beaten: and now the first thing to be done, is to get if possible upon the track which they took when so stealthily and hurriedly leaving the castle."

As they were no longer at the castellated mansion there was nothing to prevent Lady Saxondale herself from proceeding thither; and accordingly the domestics were much astonished when she suddenly arrived in a postchaise, unattended and alone. It was not however Lady Saxondale's purpose to tarry for any length of time at the castle; she immediately instituted inquiries amongst the servants in respect to the mode of Lord Saxondale's departure with his wife. She learnt that it was about one in the afternoon, three days previously, that he had arrived there in a post chaise, which was immediately dismissed—that having closeted for about an hour with Adelaide, he had given instructions for the carriage to be got in readiness—and that the equipage had borne him, his wife, and the maid, to Gainsborough, whence it had been sent back from the hotel at which they had halted in that town.

Armed with this information, to Gainsborough did Lady Saxondale forthwith repair; and continuing her inquiries, she ascertained that the fugitives, had departed in a post-chaise for Chesterfield. Once upon the track, Lady Saxondale was determined not to abandon it; and she accordingly continued her travels. For several days did she thus journey, tracing the fugitives from Chester to Derby—from Derby to Shrewsbury—from Shrewsbury into Montgomeryshire: and there the trail was lost. Notwithstanding the minuteness and the unwearied perseverance with which her inquiries were followed up, she was thrown completely off the

scent. But inasmuch as she had reached a point where the clue suddenly ceased, she came to the conclusion that those whom she sought were not very far distant. Perhaps they had settled somewhere in that part of Wales? At all events, she ceased to fear that they had gone abroad; for if such had been their intention, they would not have come in a direction diametrically opposite to the sea-ports whence the Continent was to be attained—unless indeed, fearing pursuit, they had thus come out of their way to throw the pursuers completely out. But despite the probability of such a proceeding, especially as Edmund was now advised by one so shrewd and cunning as Adelaide,—Lady Saxondale clung to the belief that they had located themselves somewhere in Wales.

Altogether three weeks had elapsed since the escape of the young nobleman from Dr. Ferney's house: and it was the commencement of the dark gloomy month of December. Wearied with her fruitless inquiries—well nigh worn out and exhausted by her travels and wanderings—Lady Saxondale resolved to return to London. The erratic life which for these three weeks she led, had only enabled her to write once to Lord Harold, and to receive one letter in reply. This letter informed her that he had not as yet found an opportunity of carrying into execution his scheme with regard to Madge Somers; for that William Deveril was almost always at the villa, and it was next to impossible to attempt anything while he was there to protect the invalid. Harold however assured Lady Saxondale that he had spies constantly watching the house—that he himself had taken a lodging in the neighbourhood, so as to be on the alert at any moment when an opportunity for action should present itself—and, that an old gardener employed on Deveril's premises, was secretly in his pay and would give whatsoever information was requisite. In respect to Madge Somers herself, Lord Harold's letter informed Lady Saxondale that the woman had experienced a relapse—that she had been again at death's door—that she was but slowly recovering—that the faculty of speech was still absent—and that she had no strength sufficient to renew her former endeavours to write anything upon slate. Thus no positive injury had been sustained by Lady Saxondale

interests on account of this delay in getting the woman surreptitiously spirited off from Deveril's villa.

The receipt of this letter, while she was yet in Montgomeryshire, put an end to her ladyship's suspense as to what might be doing in London; and thinking it just possible that some fresh intelligence might have been received at the castle of her son's movements with his wife and the maid, she resolved to take Lincolnshire on her way back to London.

But in the meanwhile, what had Edmund and Adelaide been really doing? The reader has seen that immediately on his arrival at Saxondale Castle after his escape from the physician's house in London, he had held a consultation with his wife; and, as Lady Saxondale had foreseen, Adelaide counselled him to go into some strict retirement until he should come of age. While the horrors of incarceration were still fresh in Edmund's mind, he needed no large amount of persuasion to induce him to adopt this course. Adelaide was not anxious to return to France: Edmund disliked travelling on the Continent: and therefore it was resolved to settle themselves in Wales. They travelled post, until they reached a certain town in Montgomeryshire, where they dismissed the chaise. At the same time they removed to another hotel in this same town—adopted another name than the fictitious one which they had borne on their arrival—and from this second hotel they proceeded by a public conveyance to another town. Thus was it that they successfully broke off the clue which, until that point, Lady Saxondale had skilfully followed up.

They settled in a small but comfortable house in the neighbourhood of that town at which they definitively halted; and for the first fortnight the change of scene, although it was the drear winter season, was sufficient to amuse Edmund's mind—especially as his wife lavished upon him all those blandishing cajoleries which she was so well enabled to exercise, and which she used for the purpose of riveting the chains which her beauty had from the very first cast around him. But at the expiration of that fortnight Edmund was suddenly seized with a deep disgust for the monotony of the life he was leading. A capricious change of

this kind was quite consistent with his shallow intellect and frivolous ideas. He could not bear living under the plain name of Mr. Jones—being no longer “my lord”—having no servants to wait deferentially upon him—forced by the circumstances of the place to drink wines and partake of fare which were sorry enough for one accustomed to have his appetite pampered—no carriage nor horses—and the scenery not merely wearing the aspect of sameness, but likewise a bleak wintry dreariness, around him. Even the very local circulating library itself was deficient in attractions for one of his capacity: and the only source of cheering thoughts was to be found in the blandishments of his wife. But even in respect to her, certain cold shuddering alarms would again steal upon him—the same as those he had experienced when they were at Saxondale House; and as his mind became more and more desponding, those vague apprehensions grew more potent. Thus, by the time two short weeks had elapsed, Edmund felt that he could endure this monotony of existence no longer. It had already become insupportable.

Adelaide, who watched him constantly, failed not to comprehend what was passing within him; and she saw that it would be useless for her to endeavour to keep him in that seclusion any longer. Another consultation was accordingly held; and Edmund vowed that he would dare all dangers and go up to London. Adelaide suggested that it would perhaps be more prudent to return to the castle. There they could not possibly be taken by surprise, if a good look-out were kept: the domestics of the household were numerous—and the emissaries of a mad-doctor, instead of accomplishing their purpose, might be plunged for their pains into the Trent. Besides, Edmund might find amongst the gentry around some little society: for Adelaide thought that, in the country, persons, would be less particular than in London, and that the zeal with which English people pay homage to a lord would induce them to turn a deaf ear to any flying rumours which might be in circulation with regard to the said lord's wife. Moreover, now that first impression of alarm in respect to the mad-house had passed away, neither Edmund nor Adelaide much fancied that Lady Saxondale would revert to the same proceeding.

At all events, they could be upon their guard as before said; and one of the first steps to be taken on their return to the castle, might be to write a letter to her ladyship, advising her for her own sake to abstain from hostilities in future, unless she wished an open warfare to arise and certain unpleasant revelations to be made in respect to herself.

Under all these circumstances therefore, the result of the consultation was a resolve to retrace their way to Saxondale Castle. They set out—they travelled by easy stages—and it was on a dark December evening that they once more crossed the threshold of the castellated mansion. When Edmund again found himself seated in the spacious, handsomely furnished, and well lighted dining-room—at a board served with succulent repast, and the choicest wines sparkling upon the table—he felt as blithe and happy as a school-boy on his first day at home for the holidays. Nor was Adelaide herself sorry to be once more in that palatial residence—with troops of servants at her command—equipages ready at her bidding—and the treatment she experienced being that of a lady of title.

On the second day after their return—and at about eleven in the forenoon—as Edmund and Adelaide were deliberating together how they should while away the time till dinner, a post-chaise rolled up to the gate of the castle. In a few minutes one of the domestics who had received special instructions to be on the look out, hurried up to the room where Edmund and his wife were seated. The man rushed in somewhat unceremoniously, to announce that Lady Saxondale had just arrived.

"I will not see her!" exclaimed Edmund, starting to his feet from the sofa on which he was lounging by Adelaide's side.

"Is her ladyship alone?" inquired his wife: and on receiving an answer in the affirmative, she said in a hurried whisper to her husband, "Yes, let us see her. Perhaps she comes to propose some terms? At all events if she be alone, she is harmless."

"Well then, we will see her," cried Edmund aloud: and the domestic hastened away.

In a few minutes the door was thrown open; and Lady Saxondale made her appearance. She looked somewhat pale and haggard from

excitement of mind and body—but yet not so much altered nor worn as most other women under such circumstances would have been: for she was of great physical capacity of endurance, as well as of being endowed with strong mental power. She entered with a composed but severe look; and Adelaide, who was deeply skilled in reading the human heart through the medium of the countenance at once saw that she had some sternly settled purpose in view. Edmund was not enabled thus deeply to fathom the state of his mother's mind; and he surveyed her with an air of mingled mockery and supercilious contempt. Slowly and deliberately she put off her bonnet and shawl, and took a seat. More than a minute thus elapsed from the moment she entered the room—and not a word was spoken by either one of the three.

"I have been seeking you both," at length said Lady Saxondale, in a voice that was coldly calm and as severe as her looks; "and it was only at an early hour this morning I learnt that you had returned two days ago to the castle."

"Well, mother," ejaculated Edmund, with a tone and manner which under any other circumstances might be described as flippantly insolent, but which was really nothing more than what such a parent deserved, and indeed might expect on the part of such a son,—“what business is it of yours when we come or when we go? Now, I just tell you my mind. Your conduct towards me has been shameful; and if I were to lock you up for the next six months on bread and water, in one of the tapestry-chambers, or even in the chapel itself, I should be only serving you right. However, you had better take care what tricks you play me in future: for I vow and protest that I will pay you off in a coin you won't like!"

"Cease this impertinence," said Lady Saxondale, in a peremptory tone.

"But you, madam," exclaimed Adelaide, now firing up, "must fully comprehend that you are not permitted to give yourself these airs in our presence."

"And you, madam, understand," returned Lady Saxondale, drawing herself up with the haughtiest dignity "that you are both of you only in this castle by sufferance—that for the present it is mine, or at least under

my control—and that the domestics will obey whatsoever order I choose to give them."

"There may be two words to that!" exclaimed Edmund. "If you like to try it on, mother, we will just ring the bell; and when I order the first footman who comes, to turn you out, we will see whether I am obeyed or not."

"I was fully prepared for some such insolence as this from you, young viper that you are!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, for an instant losing the command of her temper.

"Viper—eh?" echoed Edmund. "If you want to see who can best call each other hard names, I don't mind giving you a specimen of my ability, by telling you that you are nothing better than a demirep; and you might as well take yourself off to William Deveril or Lord Harold—and perhaps a dozen others, for anything I know."

Lady Saxondale's countenance became scarlet—and her lips moved as if she were about to give vent to some strong ejaculation: but catching back, as it were, the word ere uttered—and at the same time exerting the strongest power of control over her feelings, she said, "I have but a very few words to say: you will both do well to listen; and perhaps the communication I purpose to make, will convince you that I am not to be insulted with impunity. Now let us bandy not these idle taunts. I can assure you that the syllables I am about to utter, are fraught with more importance than you may possibly imagine."

"We are all attention," said Adelaide, glancing with rapid significance at Edmund, as much as to make him understand that it were better to allow his mother to have her say.

"Yes," continued Lady Saxondale: "matters have come to such a point that I am resolved to bring them to a settlement in one way or another, without an hour's delay. You two, no doubt, hug the belief that in a short time—in less than a year and a half from the present date—I shall suddenly become altogether powerless; that I shall sink into a mere cypher, and ye will be dominant! Now, that is a position which I am not at all prepared to accept; and sooner than look forward to such ignominy, I would bring the whole fabric of grandeur, wealth, and titles, crashing and crumbling in ruins upon the heads of us all."

Edmund gave a supercilious toss of his head: but Adelaide, laying her hand on his knee, said, "Hush!"—for she saw plainly enough that lady Saxondale was speaking with too solemn a seriousness, and likewise with too much cold desperation in her resolve, not to have the inward consciousness of being enabled to perform that which she threatened. Lord Saxondale accordingly held his peace; and his mother went on in the following manner:—

"There is a secret which my soul has hitherto treasured up as a criminal would hold fast the tale of his guilt! It is a secret which—"

At this moment the sounds of numerous voices talking beneath the windows, reached the ears of the three persons in the apartment where this scene was taking place; and so loud—with so much apparent excitement too were those voices discoursing—that Edmund started up, exclaiming, "What is that?"

Going to the window, he looked forth—and beheld a number of the servants, male and female, gathered beneath the casement; and in the midst of them was a man in the dress of a peasant, displaying some kind of garment which he held up, so that it floated out at full length.

"What on earth can this mean?" ejaculated Edmund, who, in his silly curiosity, had for the moment lost sight of the very grave and serious manner in which his mother had just been speaking.

"Return to your seat, dear Edmund," said Adelaide: "never mind what is taking place elsewhere."

"But here is something very odd going on!" he exclaimed. "The servants all gathered together—a labouring man amongst them—What the deuce is it? He is holding up a woman's gown, I declare! Ah, what is it they say?—'*Found in the river?*'"

Lady Saxondale now hurried to the window, as if she had more curiosity than her daughter-in-law Adelaide, who only proceeded thither more leisurely—doubtless thinking that whatsoever might be going on was of very trivial importance indeed. Lady Saxondale had scarcely flung forth a glance from that casement, when she turned abruptly round, saying, "Something extraordinary has occurred: I must see what it is."

"And I will go too," cried Edmund, following close behind Lady Saxondale as she hurried forth from the room.

Adelaide remained behind, ashamed at the idea of displaying what she conceived to be a childish curiosity, and wondering that Lady Saxondale could possibly do so. Her ladyship was hurrying—indeed rushing most swiftly down the stairs,—when she caught the sounds of Edmund's footsteps behind her. All in an instant she stopped short: and seizing the young nobleman by the arm with a convulsive violence of touch, she looked at him with a deadly pallor of countenance,—and said in a low hoarse whisper, "Edmund, if you recognise anything, I charge you to remain silent! Speak not a word—betray not the fact by a look—treat it with seeming indifference; and I swear to you that, as a recompense, I will do all that you wish—all that you ask! I will attempt to coerce you no more!"

Edmund gazed upon his mother with a sort of stupid astonishment: he really and truly thought for a moment she was suddenly going mad. The pallor of her countenance was absolutely ghastly: her eyes had a fixed and sinister stare: her ashy lips were quivering: she seemed as if she trembled all over with a glacial chill. In this fearful aspect which she wore, there was something too terribly real—too awfully genuine—not to smite him with the conviction that so far from being mad, she was keenly and poignantly intelligent to the imminence of some dreadful danger: and catching the infection of her own dire alarm—losing for the moment, in the bewilderment of his senses, the full meaning of the words which she had just addressed to him—he said, "Good God! mother, what is it?"

"Be calm, Edmund—be calm—be composed!" was the quick response she gave in a deep hollow voice, while her fingers closed rigidly upon his arm, as if that arm were grasped with claws of iron. "Be calm, I say! Not a word to Adelaide!—not a word, I conjure you! listen, Edmund—dear Edmund! do me this service—and I will never molest you more. Pray, pray forgive me for the past—And now come—let us go down together. You will recognise something—for god's sake appear not to recognise it!"

Lord Saxondale could not give utterance to a syllable; he was still half bewildered and half astounded by his awful change which had suddenly

come over her ladyship, and by those words to which she had given such rapid and excited utterance, though in so hollow and subdued a tone. He proceeded down the stairs mechanically,—at the bottom she caught him by the arm again, and said hurriedly "Adelaide is coming! Not a word! Remember my promise! I swear to fulfil it?"

Edmund's wife, on a second thought, had conceived that there must be something more in all this than she had at first imagined; and she accordingly decided upon following her husband and mother-in-law down the stairs. The sounds of her footsteps had thus reached Lady Saxondale's ears, and made her breathe this last adjuration, full of vehement entreaty, though low in utterance, in the ear of her son. Almost immediately afterwards they were overtaken by Adelaide, who exclaimed, "Wherefore all this excitement?"

"We do not know—we are going to see," responded Lady Saxondale, without turning her head round towards Adelaide, but now speaking in her natural voice once more.

"Yes, we are going to see," added Edmund, still so much bewildered as scarcely to know what he did say.

The three traversed the great hall, and emerged forth from the front-door which was standing open. A little way on the right of the entrance-steps stood the group of domestics, male and female, with the peasant in the midst; and this last-mentioned individual was displaying the long garment, which indeed was nothing more nor less than a lady's gown. But that dress—Ah! it was instantaneously recognised by Lord Saxondale, stained, soiled, and dripping with water though it were. It was the masquerade costume which he knew that his mother had once worn!

Edmund—now all in a moment comprehending the meaning of Lady Saxondale's words—threw upon her a look of quick significance, and thus met her appealing eye as they were turned upon him.

CHAPTER CLIV.

THE MASQUERADE-DRESS

THE servants and the peasant were all talking at the moment Edmund, his mother, and his wife, issued from the

entrance-hall: but on beholding them, their voices suddenly ceased through a feeling of respectful deference. Edmund did nothing: Adelaide gazed with curiosity: and Lady Saxondale, with her usual air of perfect composure, inquired, "What is all this excitement about?"

"Please your ladyship," answered the peasant, "I just now dragged this out of the river. I was going along the bank at a very little distance from the castle on the other side"—and he pointed in the Sainsborough direction—"when I saw something that looked like a woman's dress: and I was at first afraid it was a male drowned. So I waded in, and drew out this gown. It had some string round it; and what seemed to be some little bits of thick paper just sticking to the string. Leastways I took it to be paper: but it all came off in my hand—However, here's the dress; and a very nice one it must have been, though the mud has soiled it and the water has taken out the colour."

"One would think it had been a masquerading dress," observed Lucilla to the lady's maid: but the remark was browned forth without any sinister intent, as she was perfectly ignorant that her mistress had ever worn such a costume.

"But I tell your ladyship what," continued the peasant, "as I have been already telling your ladyship's servants, recollect perfectly well that one of those poor young women——"

"Edmund, it is very cold out here," said Lady Saxondale, turning quickly to her son, but darting upon him a significant look at the same time. "Let us go into the hall, and hear what the man has to say."

With these words she took the young nobleman's arm; and as they ascended the entrance-steps together, she breathed in a hurried and scarcely audible whisper, "For heaven's sake, Edmund, as little emotion as possible!"

"Don't be afraid," was Lord Saxondale's immediate response, also quickly whispered: for now that the first access of excitement had gone by, he comprehended that by some means or another his mother was completely in his power; and though he could not at the moment precisely settle his thoughts as to the full meaning of her alarm, he was nevertheless already smitten with some dark and dreadful suspicion.

Adelaide was too keen not to observe something peculiar on the part of her

husband and her mother-in-law,—especially as she had noticed that rapid exchange of significant glances which had taken place the instant Edmund's eyes had encountered the saturated garment. And then Lucilla's observation, that it looked like a masquerade-costume, had brought, like a lightning-flash, a recollection to Adelaide's mind. For she had heard from Edmund's lips the whole story of the masquerade at the Duke and Duchess of Harcourt's,—how Lady Saxondale had met Lord Harold Staunton there—and how she had incited him to provoke William Deveril to a duel. She had likewise learnt how Edmund had ransacked his mother's boxes to discover that dress—and how he had succeeded: but she never knew that it had fallen into the hands of the unfortunate Emily Archer, *alias* Mademoiselle d'Alembert—for the simple reason that Lord Saxondale had thought fit to conceal from his wife the fact that he had possessed such a charming mistress. However, Adelaide saw, as we have already said, that there was something very peculiar in the present affair: but she made no observation—neither by her looks did she betray what was passing in her mind.

Lady Saxondale, leaning upon Edmund's arm, passed into the hall,—Adelaide following close—the peasant, with the dripping garment, and the domestics crowding in the rear.

"Yes, assuredly it is a masquerade-dress," said the butler, as the peasant now stretched the costume on the marble pavement.

"I was about to tell your ladyship," said this labouring man, "what my opinion is. It was at the cottage where I live with my mother and sister, that those two unfortunate women stopped for a little while that night when they were murdered——"

Here Adelaide could scarcely repress a sudden start: for all that had hitherto struck her as extraordinary in Lady Saxondale's behaviour, in a moment associated itself with the tragedy thus revealed by the last few words the labouring man had spoken. From beneath her long lashes she darted a quick glance at her mother-in-law; and her power of penetration showed her at once that the cold outward composure which her ladyship wore, was merely a mask concealing poignant

feelings of trouble and agitation that were working within. But Adelaide still remained silent; and instantaneously regaining complete command over herself, she continued to listen with merely an appearance of such curiosity as one might naturally feel under such circumstances.

"And I noticed," continued the peasant, "that the one who seemed the servant-girl, carried a large parcel done up in brown paper, and tied round with string. Now, when the bodies were discovered murdered on the bank of the river, the parcel had disappeared; and this was proved on the inquest. I really do believe the dress that lies there was what the parcel contained. It seems that the servant's mistress was a theatre-dancer, or something of that sort; and so perhaps she was accustomed to wear this very identical dress. Depend upon it, my lady, that my opinion isn't far wrong."

"Perhaps not," said Lady Saxondale, with the appearance of her wonted calmness. "But the incident is of no consequence now: it cannot assist in the discovery——"

But here she stopped short; and stooping down, affected to examine the texture of the wet garment.

"Please your ladyship, with due deference," suggested the butler, "I think this incident ought to be made known to a magistrate."

"And please your ladyship," added the steward, "such is my idea. The murder was as mysterious as it was horrible; and everything at all connected with it, must of necessity be made public."

"Besides," continued the butler, "there are instances where police-officers are so uncommon sharp, that the slightest clue puts them on the right scent—and a new link in a chain serves as a guide to the detection of the guilty ones."

"Yes," said the peasant: "I am determined to go to some justice of the peace, and tell him what I have found. Besides, it would seem as if the thing sat heavy on my conscience, if I didn't do so. Let me see—who's the nearest justice—Mr. Denison or Mr. Hawkshaw? By the bye, I have got a call to make in the direction of Hawkshaw Hall; and so I'll go straight off there at once."

An expression of trouble, which she could not possibly subdue, passed over

the features of Lady Saxondale, as the labouring man thus spoke. The servants all beheld that look on the part of their mistress: but they every one attributed it to a feeling of mingled annoyance and shame at the mention of the name of Hawkshaw, which they naturally supposed must vividly bring back to her mind the dread exposure of that day when the intended twofold wedding was interrupted and cut short. Edmund likewise observed that look, and it strengthened the dark suspicion which had already arisen in his mind; while Adelaide, more prompt to jump at an extreme conclusion, felt her own suspicion fully confirmed.

"Well, my good fellow," said Lord Saxondale, thinking it better to put a stop to this matter, if possible, "I don't know that you need trouble Squire Hawkshaw——Just leave the dress here, and I'll deliberate what is to be done with it."

"Beg your lordship's pardon," replied the peasant; "But this is a matter for a justice to sift. I should have gone straight off with it at once: only just as I dragged it out of the river, the steward was passing along—and as we got talking on the subject, I came as far as the castle. No offence, my lord, for not taking your lordship's advice: but where murder has been done, no good ever comes of keeping a thing in one's own hands—and I sha'n't feel easy in my mind till I have delivered this dress up to a justice."

"Well, my good man, have your own way," interrupted Lady Saxondale. "I see that you are very wet—you have been in the water. Go to the servants' hall, and get some refreshments before you set out on your walk."

Having thus spoken, Lady Saxondale turned away, beckoning Edmund and Adelaide to follow her; and she began ascending the stair-case. Her son did at once accompany her: but his wife lingered in the hall; and as the domestics were moving away in company with the peasant, who had rolled up the dress, and whom they were conducting to their own premises to give him some refreshments,—Adelaide beckoned Lucilla towards her.

"What dreadful murder was this my girl," she inquired, "to which allusion has been made? I never heard of it before; and I know that my lord

and her ladyship will give me no particulars, for fear of frightening me."

"Ah, my lady," responded Lucilla, naturally supposing that she was thus questioned through mere ordinary curiosity on the part of Adelaide; "it was indeed a shocking thing. Let me see? It happened four or five months back—To be sure! Lady Macdonald and Lady Florina Staunton were staying at the castle—Yes, and Lord Harold too——"

"Ah! Lord Harold Staunton was staying here at the time—was he?"

"Yes, my lady. I recollect he was ill in bed: he had been thrown from one of Mr. Hawkshaw's horses, which he would persist in riding. It was very mad of his lordship, you know, when he was implored not to do it: for the horse was a very spirited one——"

"Well, but about this dreadful tragedy," said Adelaide.

"Dreadful indeed, my lady! The victims were an opera-dancer and her servant—the dancer's name was Mademoiselle d'Alembert: but if I recollect right, her real one was Emily Archer; and she was a splendid creature, as I have heard say. Well, my lady, they were both found shot dead on the bank of the river—one through the brain, the other through the heart——"

"And was this in the middle of the night?" inquired Adelaide.

"Oh, no—not in the middle of the night. About ten o'clock, as near as I can recollect."

"And where were they going?"

"Ah! that nobody knows," responded Lucilla. "It was thought at the time——"

But here she stopped short, perceiving the immense error she was about to commit, and into which she had almost been inadvertently betrayed in the somewhat excited state of her thoughts under the influence of those horrible recollections which had been so forcibly brought back to her mind.

"What were you going to say, Lucilla?" inquired Adelaide.

"Oh! nothing my lady——"

"Nonsense! you were about to say something. Speak candidly: there is naught to which you can give utterance in respect to the present topic, that will offend me."

"I would rather not, my lady. I was foolish—very foolish," responded

Lucilla, becoming every instant more and more confused.

"Now I beg that you will speak candidly," said Adelaide. "Nay, I command you. Proceed: do not be afraid of giving me offence."

"Well, my lady, since you order—but pray don't mention to his lordship—I would not for the world make mischief——indeed, I would rather not say any more——"

"Lucilla, this is foolish. Proceed."

"Well, to be sure, it was before my lord was acquainted with your ladyship; and so there's no harm done."

"What is it?" demanded Adelaide impatiently. "Do not trifle with me thus."

"I was only going to observe, my lady, that if his lordship did really know something of Emily Archer—I suppose young noblemen will be gay now and then——"

"To be sure! I comprehend you. Of course it has nothing to do with me. This unfortunate Emily Archer was intimate, you mean, with lord Saxondale? Don't be frightened, Lucilla: you have not offended me—and I shall not mention that I have learnt anything from you. But I suppose his lordship was not here at the castle when the murder took place?"

"Oh! no, my lady: he was in London, and had not been here for some time. His lordship never liked the castle: it was too dull——"

"But where was it thought that the two women were going at the time?" inquired Adelaide.

"Well, my lady, it was whispered that Miss Emily Archer and her maid were coming to the castle for some purpose or another."

"Why was it thought so?"

"Oh, for several reasons. In the first place," continued Lucilla, "what could they have possibly been doing in the neighbourhood between nine and ten at night, unless they were coming to the castle? They were stopping at an hotel at Gainsborough at the time. Then again, what could they have come into Lincolnshire at all for, except to see her ladyship, or else in the hope of finding Lord Saxondale down here? Perhaps, my lady, his lordship may have turned neglectful in London——But there is yet another reason why I think they were coming to the castle."

"And that reason?" said Adelaide.

"Why, my lady, the very day before the one in the evening of which the murder took place, a post-chaise drove

up to the castle—a lady got out—and her maid remained in the vehicle. The lady gave no name, and said it was useless, as she was not known to Lady Saxondale; but she had a long interview with her ladyship, and then went away. It never struck any of us at the time that this lady and her maid who were murdered, might have been the very same that came to the castle: but some days after the inquest, when we read in the country papers full particulars and descriptions, we thought they must be the same. Of course you know it was not for her ladyship to go to the inquest and say anything about the matter: because it was rather a delicate subject in respect to my lord;—and whether or not the females were the same who called at the castle, and whether or not they were again coming here in the evening when they were killed, had nothing to do with the circumstance of the murder. Poor things! they were no doubt waylaid by some ruffians."

"No doubt of it," observed Adelaide.

"I hope your ladyship will not mention that I have been talking so much on the subject," said Lucilla, who dearly loved a gossip, but who now began to reflect that she had been speaking very frankly and familiarly indeed to Lord Saxondale's wife upon a topic which was rather of a delicate nature.

"Fear not, Lucilla," responded Adelaide: "it is entirely my own fault that you have been led into these explanations."

"Having thus spoken, Adelaide slowly ascended the staircase towards the apartment where she expected to find her mother-in-law and her husband.

But in the meanwhile let us see what had been taking place betwixt these two. It will be remembered that when Lady Saxondale directed the servants to take the peasant along with them and give him some refreshments, she had beckoned her son and her daughter-in-law to follow her up-stairs. Those stairs she ascended mechanically, scarcely knowing what she was doing: for, as Adelaide had but too truthfully suspected, her air of cold outward composure was only a mask which the natural strength of her mind and a sort of desperate courage enabled her to assume in order to conceal the horrible feelings and terrific apprehensions that were agitating in her soul. It was not until Lady Saxondale reached the apartment that she observed her

son only was following her, and that Adelaide had remained below.

"Where is your wife?" she said, with nervous quickness, as she turned and threw a strange look upon Edmund.

"I don't know—I thought she was with us," he replied. "I scarcely know what I am thinking or doing—Upon my word, it seems as if I was in the midst of some curious dream! But now, mother, what means all this? Tell me at once——"

"Question me not, Edmund!" she interrupted him, her entire form visibly shaken with a cold tremor, which she could neither repress nor conceal. "Think what you will—but I conjure you keep a seal upon your lips: breathe not a word to a soul—answer no questions which your wife may put—and it will be all to your advantage. I cannot leave the castle immediately—it would look too strange: but in three or four days I will depart—and never more shall you be molested by me. This I solemnly swear."

"Well, at all events it is something gained," observed Edmund: and, then as he felt all his horrible suspicions in respect to his mother fully confirmed, he could not help adding, "But, my God! what made you do that?"

"Question me not I say!" she responded, half in a tone of entreaty, half in one of excited impatience. "Spare me, Edmund! show yourself above wreaking upon me any anger or malice that you may feel on account of the past."

"Just now you called me a viper," said the young nobleman, unable to resist the opportunity of giving vent to that vindictive spitefulness which was natural to him, "and that is a name you have on more than one occasion flung at me. But, look you, mother! Whatever I may be, I am not so bad——"

"Silence, Edmund—for heaven's sake silence!" ejaculated her ladyship, her countenance once more becoming absolutely ghastly and an expression of indescribable horror, mingled with anguish, sweeping over her features. "I am in your power—have mercy upon me! What more can I do than fulfil the promise I have already made you?"

"Well, keep to it—and I will say no more," rejoined the young nobleman: but even as he gazed upon Lady Saxondale, he could not help feeling an ineffable aversion—a strong loathing—a deep sense of horror, at the thought

of what she was; for as he himself had said or had meant to say, he was not so bad as to be enabled to contemplate the darkest criminality unmoved or undismayed.

"Edmund," said Lady Saxondale, suddenly recollecting something, and recoiling in affright from the idea which thus struck her, "have you ever mentioned to Adelaide anything about that dress?—But, yes! I feel convinced you have—I am sure of it! From all she said when first I met her in London, she knew everything—far, far too much!"

"Of course," responded the young nobleman, with a sort of brutal roughness: "I told Adelaide all I knew—and it was natural enough, as you have been at war with me for some time past."

"Where is Adelaide? what can she be doing? wherefore does she not rejoin us?" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, sinking upon a seat, and feeling as if all the courage which had hitherto supported her, must now give way. "Go, Edmund—tell her to come hither at once——"

But at this moment the door opened, and Adelaide entered the room,—she having just come up from her conversation with Lucilla in the hall. The instant the handle of the door moved, Lady Saxondale with a mighty effort regained her outward composure: for she knew not whether it might be one of the servants who was about to enter. But when Adelaide made her appearance, her ladyship's eyes were quickly flung upon her countenance, as if to glean from thence how much her daughter-in-law knew—how much she suspected—and how she intended to bear herself in the matter. Adelaide closed the door; and advancing straight up to Lady Saxondale, said in a voice of firm severity, "Now, will you have the kindness to take up the thread of the discourse where it was just now interrupted?"

"It is unnecessary," answered Lady Saxondale.

"Unnecessary?" ejaculated Adelaide, a smile of scornful triumph for a moment appearing upon her lips: "why has it become unnecessary? On the contrary, it is more necessary than ever that you should reveal that secret to which you so solemnly and seriously alluded; inasmuch as under existing circumstances, it behoves us all to be made aware of the position in which we stand with regard to one another."

"It is needless, I repeat," rejoined Lady Saxondale. "Ask Edmund—he will tell you that he is satisfied with the arrangements entered into between us."

"Madam," resumed Adelaide, fixing a determined look upon Lady Saxondale, "your son cannot trust you—nor can I, as his wife, trust you. You spoke of a secret the revelation of which might, if you chose, in a moment bring down the whole fabric of wealth, titles, and honours crashing and tumbling about our ears——"

"It was a menace—and I recall it," said Lady Saxondale, quivering from head to foot: then in a sort of desperation, she exclaimed, "I am beaten. Adelaide—I renounce the warfare! Henceforth I leave you both unmolested—I will go hence——What more can you demand?"

"We demand nothing more—it is precisely what we want. But," continued Adelaide, "we have no guarantee that your present demeanour is not assumed for the purpose of throwing us off our guard, the better to carry out fresh perfidies. Now, look you, Lady Saxondale! Between you and me it is diamond cut diamond: and for the interests of your son, which are identical with mine own, we must come to a thorough understanding. Have you forgotten all the revelations which Lord Harold Staunton so unconsciously made to me on that evening when in the dusk of the apartment at Saxondale House he mistook me for yourself?"

"I have forgotten nothing, Adelaide," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, again quivering all over; "and there is no need for you to refresh my memory in a single particular. Edmund, tell her that you are satisfied: and let this cease."

"Edmund will permit me," continued Adelaide, "to place matters on such a footing that henceforth he need not fear you. Listen, Lady Saxondale—do not interrupt me. On that evening to which I have alluded, when Lord Harold Staunton addressed me under the impression that he was speaking to you, he made reference to some deed which had mysteriously but terribly knitted your destinies together; and that deed which I comprehended not then, I understand now! Lord Harold Staunton was an intimate of this castle at the time when——"

"Adelaide," murmured the unhappy Lady Saxondale, the very picture of abject humiliation and despairing wretchedness,—“I have already besought Edmund to spare me: to you do I address the same prayer.”

“You understand, then,” said Adelaide, coldly implacable, “that you are in my power. Attempt but a renewal of hostilities against us—make but a sign which shall raise a suspicion that you are still full of perfidy—and—”

“No more!” almost shrieked forth the miserable woman, as she started from her chair. “I understand you—and I will henceforth be your slave, if you will!”

With these words she quitted the room: and repairing to the bedchamber which she was wont to occupy when at the castle, gave way to thoughts and feelings which may perhaps be better understood than described.

CHAPTER CLV.

THE RAMBLE.

MR. HAWKSHAW was seated with a friend at lunch, in one of the handsome apartments of his residence, and at about two o'clock on the day of which we are writing. This friend was Mr. Denison; and they were conversing together upon a variety of topics,—amongst which the presence of Edmund and his wife in Lincolnshire was included.

“I suppose you have heard,” said Denison, “that Lord Saxondale and his bride came back to the castle a day or two ago?”

“Yes,” answered Hawkshaw; “and by the bye, have you caught the rumour which is afloat, that Saxondale had been confined in a mad-house?”

“I know that is true,” responded Denison. “A friend of mine, writing to me from London two or three weeks back, mentioned the circumstances: but it appears that he was not many days in confinement—and how he got liberated I have not learnt.”

“Ah, it is a strange family—a strange family altogether!” said Mr. Hawkshaw, shaking his head gloomily, as his thoughts at the moment specially reverted to the treacherous attempt of Juliana to inveigle him into a marriage, polluted and unchaste as she was.

“Yes—it is singular,” observed Mr. Denison, “that everything unpleasant in connection with that family, should have come out all at the same time. Here, within a few months, we have had extraordinary evidences of their profanity of their folly. The mother exposed in respect to Mr. Deveril, and it being likewise tolerably certain that Lord Harold Staunton was her paramour—the deplorable affair in respect to Juliana, in which you, my dear friend, had so lucky an escape—Lord Harold's mysterious, and I might almost say burglarious entry, with some common ruffian, into the castle—Lord Saxondale's monstrous marriage—”

“Monstrous indeed!” ejaculated Hawkshaw: “the epithet is the very best you could have applied to it. But does his wife possibly entertain the hope that she will be received into society by the good families in Lincolnshire?”

“It is very certain,” rejoined the Squire's friend, “that neither Mrs. Denison nor any other members of my family, purpose to call at the castle. It may seem hard that a woman who has been acquitted by a jury, should be thus punished by society: it may even savour of unjustifiable vindictiveness on the part of the world; but it is impossible to read the trial without coming to the conclusion that she was really guilty.”

“Ah! you have read it, then?” said Hawkshaw. “So have I. It has been published in a work of celebrated criminal trials—”

“The very book in which I myself found the account,” observed Denison. “But come, Squire, let us turn the conversation on a more agreeable topic. Tell me candidly,” continued the old gentleman, with a smile, “have you not so far recovered your passion for Juliana as to think of committing matrimony in some other quarter?”

“Recovered?” exclaimed Hawkshaw almost indignantly. “You ought to know, my dear friend, that I was startled up from that dream in the very hour that I obtained the conviction of her tremendous perfidy.”

At this moment a footman entered to inform Mr. Hawkshaw that a peasant requested an audience of him in his capacity of a magistrate. The Squire directed that the man should

shown to the library; and luncheon being now over, he said to Mr. Denison, "You may as well come with me, and hear whatsoever the applicant may have to say."

To the library the two gentlemen accordingly repaired; and Hawkshaw immediately recognised the peasant as one of the witnesses who had given evidence at the inquest held upon the two murdered women—at which inquest, he it remembered, he was present as a spectator. The man now carried a large parcel done up in paper: for we should observe that before quitting Saxondale Castle, he had dried the dress at the fire in the servants' hall, and had then enveloped it in the manner in which he now bore it.

"Well, my good fellow," said Squire Hawkshaw, as he and Mr. Denison took their seats at the table, "what do you want with me?"

The peasant's explanations were speedily given; and as they were the same which have been already recorded, we need not reiterate them. Suffice it to say, he concluded by observing that he did not know whether the incident would in any way assist the course of justice, or enable its officials to resume the clue of the investigations they had made at the time,—but that he considered it to be his duty to bring the case under the cognisance of a magistrate. The parcel was opened—the dress produced—and minutely inspected by Mr. Hawkshaw and Mr. Denison.

"And you say," observed the former "that you have shown it at Saxondale Castle—and that Lady Saxondale herself is there?"

The peasant replied in the affirmative.

"Then I suppose," continued the Squire, addressing the remark to Denison, "that her ladyship is reconciled to her son and her daughter-in-law? However, in respect to the present business, I do not see that the discovery of this dress will in any way enable the constables at Gainsborough to resume their inquiry. It may, or it may not be, that the dress was contained in the parcel which was proved to have been in the hands of the maid on the fatal evening: but granting it is the same, there are two inferences to be drawn—either that it accidentally rolled into the river when the deed was committed, or that it was flung there by the murderer or murderers as something not worth caring off."

"This latter inference, Hawkshaw, is scarcely to be deduced," observed Mr. Denison: "for why should the assassin thus seek to dispose of the dress? Would he not have merely tossed it down on the bank, if he did not choose to take it away with him?"

"But in any case I cannot see," remarked Hawkshaw, "that the discovery of this masquerading-gear—for such it evidently is—can be turned to any account in furtherance of the cause of justice."

"Do you recollect," asked Mr. Denison, who was a shrewd and thoughtful man, "whether the bed of the river itself was searched for the weapon or weapons with which the double murder was accomplished?"

"I don't think it was," answered Hawkshaw: "and indeed I should have fancied that it would have been useless."

"Not so useless as you would imagine," said Mr. Denison. "An assassin frequently flings away the weapon with which his foul deed has been perpetrated; and your own memory must furnish you with several instances of crimes having been thus brought home to their authors."

"I have heard of knives, when stained with blood, being thrown away in the manner you describe," responded the Squire: "but pistols——"

"And why not pistols?" asked Mr. Denison. "Is not one weapon as often gifted with a tell-tale tongue as another?—I mean in respect to its identification as belonging to some particular individual. A murderer throws away his weapon under several influences:—first, in order that nothing criminatory may be found upon him, if he be stopped, suspected, and searched: secondly, in the sudden horror which supervenes after the commission of the deed: thirdly, on being alarmed by the sounds of voices or footsteps. And now that I bethink me, in the case of which we are talking, the murderer or murderers were thus alarmed: for our friends the Marquis of Eagledean and Mr. Deveril were almost instantaneously on the spot. Assuredly it was a great fault if the river was not thoroughly searched at the time."

"Well, I am almost sure that it was not," replied Mr. Hawkshaw: "for I was present at the inquest, and I heard the head-constable of Gainsborough

give his evidence, stating all the measures he had adopted to discover some clue. The rain, you recollect, fell in torrents that night; and all foot-marks were obliterated on the soft soil. He looked about for string or brown paper, to discover if possible a clue to the direction which had been taken by the author or authors of the crime after its perpetration; and he found nothing. All these details do I recollect."

"Well then, it will perhaps be useful," observed Mr. Denison, "to give the head-constable a hint; and he may yet have the bed of the river searched for the purpose I have described. You, my good man," added the old gentleman, now addressing himself to the peasant, "can tell him so from me: because the best thing you can do is to take this dress to the head-constable at once. You have acted judiciously and prudently in consulting magisterial authority; and here is a guinea for you."

Mr. Hawkshaw added another; and the peasant took his departure, infinitely delighted with the presents he had thus received. He carried the dress away with him; and returning to his own home, communicated to his mother and sister all that had taken place. Although he had walked many miles, he nevertheless set out again in the evening for Gainsborough, and repaired at once to the residence of the head-constable, to whom he gave every explanation, likewise delivering the message from Mr. Denison to the effect that it would perhaps be as well if the bed of the river were searched in the neighbourhood of the spot where the crime was committed. The constable promised compliance with this suggestion, and assured the peasant that he would consider whether the possession of the masquerade apparel would in any way further the ends of justice.

On the following morning the constable sent for the female who had been charged at the time of the tragedy to disapparel the corpses of the murdered women; and he desired her to examine the dress minutely, and inform him, to the best of her recollection, whether it would have fitted either the dancer or her servant? In respect to the latter, the woman at once gave a negative response,—the unfortunate abigail having been too slender in figure and too short in stature for such a costume:

nor indeed was it probable that she could have had such a dress for her own wearing. The woman examined it for some time; and ultimately pronounced her opinion to the following effect:—

"I perfectly well remember the form and stature of the unfortunate ballet-dancer. She was tall enough to wear this dress, but not sufficiently stout. The costume was evidently made for a woman of considerable development of contours, although the figure must have been of perfect symmetry. The wearer of such a garb would be what is termed a very fine woman."

The next step which the head-constable at Gainsborough took, was to summon to his counsels the most experienced milliner in the town; and he desired her to give her opinion in respect to the raiment,—mentioning certain details on which he sought to be enlightened. The milliner, after minutely examining the dress, and likewise consulting a book of costumes which she possessed, delivered herself in the ensuing manner:—

"This is intended to represent a Spanish costume, belonging to the Court of that country of about three hundred years ago. Soiled, faded, and ruined as it is, there is no difficulty in ascertaining that it was of the richest materials, and that its trimmings and its embellishments were of the very costliest description. I have no hesitation in pronouncing that such a dress could only have been intended for a lady of rank, or at least of great wealth; and furthermore my opinion is that it was made in London. I do not think that any provincial milliner could have turned out such an exquisite piece of workmanship as this must undoubtedly have been. The person for whom it was intended must have possessed a superb figure, of well developed proportions, but yet of a just and admirable symmetry."

Having obtained this information, the head-constable necessarily came to the conclusion that the dress belonged neither to the opera-dancer nor to her servant. It must therefore have been brought into that neighbourhood with the intention of being delivered into the hands of some lady for whom it was made. The constable remembered how it had been intimated at the inquest, that the unfortunate deceased Emily Archer had boasted at the peasant's cottage of her acquaintance with Lord Saxondale and Lord

old Staunton. He likewise reflected that the idea had all along existed that two women were on their way to the castle when they met their untimely and dreadful fate. Thus, was it natural, he should now ask himself the question, whether that masquerade dress, hastily intended for Lady Saxondale, or any guest who might happen to be coming with her at the time? If it were the fact might at the first glance appear to be of but the most trivial importance, inasmuch as no matter whither the women were bound at the time, nor what errand might be the constable concerned it to be perfectly clear that they had been intercepted by a miscreant or criminals, who, for purposes of plunder, had assassinated them. But still he deemed it important to ascertain every possible particular in respect to the time: he knew full well that the most significant facts, and those which at first appear to be most irrelevant, are sometimes found to enter as important links into a chain of evidence. Not, he understood, that the head-constable fancied for a single moment there was any secret at Saxondale Castle, either at the time of the tragedy or on the present occasion, who could throw the faintest light upon the authorship of the foul deed: he was merely now reflecting that it was important to arrive at the knowledge of any fresh particular concerning which such information could be secured.

We should add that the head-constable of Gainsborough had been much blamed at the time—as indeed is always the case with police-authorities in such cases—for not having discovered the murderers. It had been said that he was inefficient: and an attempt was even made to remove him from his situation. He had thus an important incentive to make him display fresh activity in respect to any new particulars which transpired.

The head-constable, having learnt from the peasant on the preceding evening that his mind to call upon her for the purpose of soliciting any information which she might be able to give on the two specific points—whether the murdered women were expected to call upon her on the night of the tragedy, and whether the dress was for herself or any guest staying with her at the time? But when it occurred to the official, that if the dress had really been for her ladyship, she could not have failed to

recognise it as being such a one as she had ordered to be made, when the peasant took it to the castle and displayed it as already described. On the other hand, the constable argued that if her son Lord Saxondale had really been unduly intimate with Emily Archer, her ladyship would have naturally avoided any unnecessary allusion on the point, and might have chosen to keep to herself whatsoever she knew in respect to that dress. Then again he reflected how improbable it was that the son's mistress—if such she were—should have been employed as the bearer of a parcel for the mother. Thus, altogether the constable grew more and more bewildered the longer he meditated on the matters: the day was passing away—and he could decide upon nothing. Finally, however, in the evening, he consulted a friend; and by his advice, adopted his original resolution of proceeding to the castle.

We must however go back to an earlier part of this same day, in order to describe an incident which occurred, and which must be necessarily interwoven in our narrative.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon—as the dusk (at the wintry season of December was approaching—that Lady Saxondale was returning from a long and lonely walk which she had been taking. As the reader may suppose, her mind was in a wretchedly unsettled state: she could not bear to be in-doors—she could not endure the presence of her son and daughter-in-law, to whom she had completely succumbed; neither could she keep her own chamber altogether, as this would appear strange in the eyes of the domestics. She had therefore rambled abroad soon after mid-day: she had roamed about pondering upon an infinite variety of circumstances, not one of which wore an agreeable aspect: she had likewise revolved a thousand new plots and plans, not one of which could she determine on as practicable or safe;—and she was now returning, at about three o'clock, to the castle, well nigh broken in spirit,—deeply, miserably, wretchedly desponding. Looking back through the vista of years she remembered, when as the proud and envied bride of the old lord of the Castle, she had first trodden with elastic step upon that

soil as its mistress; and when, though her bridegroom was sufficiently aged to be her grandfather, she nevertheless gloried in the marriage as one that had raised her from the humble grade of a country clergyman's daughter to the lofty rank of a patrician of the land. Ah! at that time, little, little did she suspect what her future years were destined to evolve!—little, little did she foresee what poignant anxieties, what manifold chicaneries—aye, and what dark crimes, too, were to make up the component parts of her as yet untrodden career. But the present—the present! what was she to do now? Was she to abandon herself, without a single effort, to the loss of power, of influence, and of authority? was she succumb without a struggle to Edmund whom she abhorred, and Adelaide whom she detested? was she to endure, unavenged, the young lord's insolent superciliousness and his bride's triumphant arrogance? Was she likewise to fulfil, her pledge, and in a day or two depart from the castle, never to return!—was she to fly to the Continent, bury herself in some seclusion, and pass the remainder of her days in a wretched obscurity? For wretched such obscurity would indeed prove to the proud, the active, and the domineering disposition of the ambitious Lady Saxondale.

Ah! but how to avoid all this?—*that* was the question. That she could still coerce Edmund if he were *alone*, she had no doubt. She would pervert with him a new game: instead of tyrannizing over him, she would flatter, cajole, and coax him—she would immerse him in pleasures—she would surround him with the luxuries which he loved—she would adopt every means to enervate and emasculate him—and thus would she acquire the fullest ascendancy over his mind, so as virtually to keep him imprisoned within the scope of her influence. All this she might do if he were *alone*: but he was not! He had continually by his side a woman as astute, as artful, as designing, and as penetrating as herself—a woman who could doubtless prove equally unscrupulous—a woman who, Lady Saxondale doubted not, was but too surely guilty of the crime of husband-murder of which she had been accused! This woman, then, it was who now stood as an impassable barrier in Lady Saxondale's pathway. But could not this

barrier be removed? could not that woman be stricken down in the midst of that path where her presence was so formidable? Yes, doubtless—by a crime—and only by a crime!

Oh! but a crime—heavens! had not Lady Saxondale sipped full of the horrors of crime already? (Crime! crime!)—was it to be ever crime? Alas, when once the road of iniquity is entered upon, crime after crime must mark the advance of those who tread it: blood-stained mile-stones do they become, indicating distances passed in safety, and pointing intervals of a still guiltier progress! Did her ladyship shudder, as the thought of another crime—one more crime—a crime that was to be the last and the crowning one, thus gradually arose in her imagination as she approached the castle on returning from her half-distracted ramble?—or did she begin to envisage it as the only possible alternative that was to save from utter ruin the fabric of that power which she had hitherto taken so much pains to build up? Were her warrings by day and her agonies of toil by night—her schemings and her plottings, her manoeuvres and her chicaneries, to have been passed through for naught? was all the catalogue of her crimes to become useless for the want of one more crime to crown everything with success?

It was while the thought of this new but last deed of turpitude was expanding and acquiring consistency in her mind, that Satan appeared greedily on the watch to help her onward to its consummation. There was a bridge across the river, at a spot where she halted for a few moments the better to commune with her thoughts; and as the arch had a much wilder span than was requisite for the actual bed of the stream—the earth having accumulated on either bank—a portion of each of those banks was left dry beneath the bridge. We say that Lady Saxondale halted at this spot for a few moments; and while she stood there gazing upon the castle which was about a quarter of a mile distant, the countenance of a man was stealthily thrust forth from under the bridge. The eyes which thus peered out, recognised Lady Saxondale's form in a moment, though the face was unseen, her back being turned towards the individual. Then an ejaculation of satisfaction, uttered in a coarse tone, reached the ears of Lady Saxondale; and as she glanced round with a

dden start, she perceived a man emerge from the dry part of the bank beneath the bridge. She too gave vent an ejaculation, as she at once recognised Chiffin the Cannibal.

"Well, my lady," said the fellow, this is indeed an unexpected pleasure though, to tell you the truth, your ladyship is just the very indentical person I was wanting to see; and in a fit of operation I meant to make my way to the castle this blessed night that is ming: for I learnt that you were staying there——"

"And what would you with me?" demanded Lady Saxondale, sweeping her rapid looks around to assure herself that she was not observed while thus scouring with that dreadful looking man. "Money, doubtless? always money! For no other purpose could you seek me."

"Now pray, your ladyship," said Chiffin, with a grim smile, "don't set me down as so uncommon selfish. In the first place, it's a blessing to enjoy the acquaintance of a noble lady like you; and in the second place, how could I know but what you might have some little business in hand that I could give a help to?"

"What are your circumstances?" asked her ladyship quickly: "desperate, presume? I thought you were going to America—that you had gone indeed——"

"Well, I told Lord Harold I should go: and I told his uncle too—that's the barquis of Eagledean—I should go: but meaning to go and going is two very different things. Don't you see, when I make up my mind one way, Fate orders another. Lord bless you! adventures crowd upon me as thick as bees did upon the bear when he upset the hive;—and that's the long and short of it. You see, my lady, it's no easy matter for a gentleman of such a high and mighty reputation as I am, to get out of the country. The folks wont part with me: they watch the seaports to prevent me getting away from them."

"I suppose that you have been committing fresh deeds of horror?" said Lady Saxondale, who only thus prolonged the discourse to gain the requisite leisure for reflection upon the idea which was now uppermost in her mind.

"Well, ma'am, I have done a little more work in that way," answered Chiffin, quite coolly and unconcernedly. "There was a feller, you see, which

had played me some tricks: so I took the liberty of pitching him down a well—and such a lazy vagabond he was, he wouldn't come out again. That was a matter of three or four weeks ago. The consequence was a row took place in the house; and I had to cut and run. I have been wandering and hiding, hiding and wandering, till I was nearly worn out! and then to crown it all, I fell in with a parcel of scamps at a little wayside public house; and getting drunk, was ass enough to show what money I had about me—upon which when I fell asleep, they robbed me of every sktarick. Then thought I to myself, there is nothing left for it but to go to the castle in the hope that her ladyship may be there. I learnt from a labouring man just now that sure enough your ladyship was there; and so I came and crept under the bridge here, to lay quiet till night time, when I meant to get to my old quarters. Now, that's the blessed truth, my lady. If you have got anything I can do for you, tell me what it is, and it shall be done: but if you have not, lend me a hundred or so—and when I am a rich man and got a large estate in North America, I will send you over a remittance."

Lady Saxondale would not have suffered the Cannibal to continue thus long in his free-and-easy, familiar discourse, were it not that she was reflecting the while in a half abstracted manner upon that idea which, as we have already said, was acquiring a greater consistency in her mind. She looked at him: his condition fully corroborated his tale, and denoted the desperation of his circumstances. His clothes were torn in several places and soiled with mud: his hat was more than ever battered: his beard was of nearly a week's growth; and yet the fellow, though in this miserable plight, had not lost the half-dogged, half devil-me-care kind of brutal recklessness, which was wont to characterise him. His hand grasped a club:—seldom indeed was it that Chiffin the Cannibal had ever been seen without his murderous bludgeon.

As Lady Saxondale thus gazed upon the ruffian, she could not help saying to herself, "It is destined that this one last crime is to be perpetrated! Scarcely had the idea taken birth in my mind, when Satan sent me the instrument to accomplish it. Ah! is it, then indeed no fable that human beings

may sell their souls to the Evil One? They can—they can; and the method of doing so by the formal means of a written compact, signed by one's own blood, is the only part of the proceeding which is a fiction. Ah! if I have thus sold myself to Satan, of a verity he leaves me not long in a dilemma, without sending me the means of self extrication; and if ever he had upon earth an agent in human shape, the incarnate demon stands before me now."

Some such reflections as these swept through the mind of Lady Saxondale, as she surveyed Chiffin the Cannibal; and at length breaking silence, she said, "So your circumstances are desperate, and it would be an object to you to earn five hundred pounds?"

"Five hundred pounds!" echoed the Cannibal, whirling his bludgeon up in the air, and catching it with a full sounding grasp of his huge, muscular hand, as it fell: "five hundred pounds Lord bless your ladyship! only a quarter of an hour back, if any body had told me there was such a sum in the world, I should really have doubt it, and fancied that I could only have dreamt of such things. But to be serious—for five hundred pounds I am the man ready to cut a dozen throats."

"Talk not thus!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, a strong shudder passing through her entire form. "Yes—there is a deed to be done, and there are five hundred pounds to be gained by the doing of it. But we must not remain here any longer now: we might be seen together—it were dangerous. Besides, after your last adventure at the castle —,"

"When that gal of your's was so horribly frightened," interjected Chiffin, with a chuckling laugh. "Well, but where shall I see your ladyship again? I suppose the rooms are still shut up, as they always used to be?"

"Yes replied Lady Saxondale; "and everything considered, it will perhaps be better for you to take up your quarters there. If seen prowling about, or observe hiding under bridges or haystacks——"

"Well, it would look rather suspicious," observed Chiffin: "partickler as I'm not exactly in a Court-dress. Depend upon it, my lady, it's the best plan: and then perhps you might come and hold a confab with me at the usual hour, and give me full instructions. But pray don't forget the blunt at the same

time; and if your ladyship *could* manage to put a flask of brandy in your pocket—or rum, or gin—I am not very particular—it would be as well: for that chapel in the winter-time must be as cold as ice."

"Well then," observed Lady Saxondale, after having again reflected for a few moments, "get presently into your old quarters; and I will seek you there punctually at midnight."

Having thus spoken, she continued her way towards the castle; while Chiffin crept under the bridge again—there to rest concealed for another hour or so, until it should be sufficiently dark to enable him to effect his entry into the shut-up apartments.

"Yes—one more crime," said Lady Saxondale to herself, as she approached the gate of the castellated mansion: "one more crime—and then may I hope for security and triumph!"

CHAPTER CLVI.

THE HEAD-CONSTABLE.

IT was about half past eight o'clock in the evening, that the head-constable of Gainsborough alighted from a gig at the gate of Saxondale Castle, and proffered a request to the porter answering his summons, that he might be allowed to speak a few words with the Dowager Lady Saxondale, adding that if it were in any way inconvenient to her ladyship, he would call again on the morrow; and that in any case he should not detain her many minutes.

Lady Saxondale had shortly after dinner retired to the library, under the pretence of writing letters—but in reality to separate herself from the company of Edmund and Adebude: for, as the reader may suppose, they did not feel themselves very comfortable in each other's presence—while anything in the shape of pleasant and agreeable conversation, was altogether out of the question. The young lord and his wife were by no means sorry to be thus rid of the restraint and awkwardness created by her ladyship's society, and they cared but little what she did or whither she went—for they now felt assured that she was utterly disarmed and completely in their power.

Lady Saxondale, we said, was in the library, when a footman entered and delivered in precise terms the message

which the head-constable of Gainsborough had sent in. At the first mention of his name, Lady Saxondale was stricken with a cold terror—a glacial chill which went quivering through her even unto her very heart's core: but nevertheless, at the distance which the footman was standing from her in the spacious library, he did not perceive that she was thus swayed by any unusual emotion. As he went on speaking, Lady Saxondale's presence of mind came back partially: for she thought to herself that the message was too civil, and that proposal of returning again on the morrow if more convenient, was too unlike a hostile proceeding, for the head-constable to have any such intention. She therefore at once bade the footman introduce the official; and during the few minutes that elapsed ere the door again opened, Lady Saxondale said to herself, "It is doubtless relative to this discovery of yesterday: but how can that dress be in any way associated with me? What clue can have been obtained. Edmund and Adelaide can have done nothing: no—I am sure not! And then too, the courtesy which marks the man's approach—No, I have nothing to fear!"

Nevertheless, as Lady Saxondale possessed a guilty conscience, she was far from being entirely free from misgivings as the constable entered the room; and her large dark eyes bent upon him the penetrating look of eagles' glances, as he bowed obsequiously in her presence. Her courage rose: for she saw that the man was himself somewhat awkward and embarrassed—and the thought flashed to her that it was probably altogether upon quite a different business he had come.

"I hope," he said, "that your ladyship will pardon this intrusion—perhaps a most unwarrantable one: but in consequence of something that has transpired, I feel it my duty to solicit a little information at your ladyship's hands."

"Upon what subject?" she inquired, with such an outward display of calmness that not for a single moment could he fancy her to be inwardly ruffled.

"It is relative to that unfortunate occurrence—that dreadful deed which was perpetrated so mysteriously a few months back; and as there is not as yet the slightest clue——"

These last words were productive of an infinite relief to Lady Saxondale; and resuming her own seat, she mentioned the constable to take a chair

"I suppose you allude to the assassination of the two women on the bank of the river?" she observed.

"It is so, my lady. That dress which your ladyship saw yesterday, has been placed in my hands. I am afraid that the subject may be a delicate one——"

"In what respect?" asked Lady Saxondale, somewhat hastily.

"My lady, rumour did at the time whisper that Lord Saxondale was somewhat intimately acquainted with Miss Archer; and therefore it is natural to understand how your ladyship may dislike having the topic brought to your attention."

"But if it be necessary for the purposes of justice," was the response, given with a perfect maintenance of outward composure, "you must not hesitate to speak, nor I to answer. You say that no clue has been obtained to the discovery——"

"Not the slightest, my lady; and that is the reason I am anxious to glean as many particulars as I can, no matter how trivial they may be. If therefore I could learn for what purpose those unfortunate women came into Lincolnshire at all: and also——"

"I will tell you candidly," interrupted Lady Saxondale, assuming the merit of a frankness which she felt convinced she might display with all possible safety. "Yes—it is true that the unfortunate Miss Archer was my son's mistress. There was a desperate quarrel between them in London: she felt aggrieved—she considered that she had claims upon him—she addressed herself to me. Indeed, I saw her within these walls the very day before that on which she and her servant lost their lives. I could not then make up my mind what to do in the matter. I had guests staying in the castle—Lady Macdonald, Lady Florina Staunton, her brother Lord Harold—while Mr. Hawkshaw and other neighbours were constant visitors. I was fearful that a character so well known by sight as a somewhat conspicuous dancer at the Opera, might be recognised by my guests or my visitors. Moreover, my son at the time was engaged to be married to Lady Florina Staunton; and it would have been shocking for that amiable and excellent girl to discover by any means that his lordship's cast-off mistress—for this in plain terms she was—was applying to me for pecuniary redress."

"Naturally enough, my lady," observed the head constable, gratified and proud at the mingled courtesy and frankness with which he felt himself to be treated.

"You can appreciate, therefore, my motives," continued her ladyship, "when I begged Miss Archer to give me time to think over the matter, and not to seek my presence again save and except under circumstances of the strictest secrecy. In justice to myself though reluctant indeed to say a word against the dead—I must observe that Miss Archer was very violent. Availing herself to her knowledge of my son's engagement with Lady Florina, she threatened an exposure; and she herself, in a very peremptory manner, made an appointment to call upon me again at the castle between nine and ten o'clock in the evening of the ensuing day, to know my decision. I confess that I was angry; and I declared that if she came in a public manner—as, for instance, in any vehicle to excite attention—I would not see her. She became more humble; and of her own accord volunteered her readiness to come on foot, of course being accompanied by her maid. To this I had no objection: but little did I foresee what a terrific peril the two fated women were destined to encounter, and how dread was to be the catastrophe."

"I thank your ladyship for these explanations," said the constable, making a low bow.

"Of course," continued her ladyship, "when the inquest was held, I saw no necessity for going forward, or sending to communicate all these facts. Consider, sir, a mother's feelings——"

"I can understand them fully," exclaimed the constable; "and it was most natural that your ladyship should study to save your son from what might have been a little exposure—and at all events would have had the effect of breaking off a marriage which your ladyship at the time was anxious he should contract. And now my lady, I have but one more word to say——"

"I can anticipate what it is," exclaimed Lady Saxondale. You would ask me relative to the dress?—and with the same frankness I have hitherto shown, will I reply. The dress was mine; but therewith was connected a certain infamous piece of scandal regarding me. You will not ask me to repeat it: suffice it to say, it was false;—but Miss Archer

had been led to believe it was true. By certain means, no matter what—she obtained possession of that dress; and she purposed to use it as a means of extortion in respect to my purse. When she called upon me, I reproached her bitterly for having adopted such vile base means; and assured her that when she again sought my presence, if she restored me not that very costly costume which had been stolen from me—yes, stolen from me—I would not listen to another word she might have to say. And now, my dear sir, with your good sense and with your delicate appreciation of circumstances, you can understand how it was that I did not choose to recognize that dress, even when inspecting it closely, on its being displayed by the labouring man yesterday."

"To be sure, not!" exclaimed the constable: "your ladyship was not to place yourself in the position of giving explanations to a peasant, and before all the members of your household."

The constable was indeed completely satisfied of the truth of every word which Lady Saxondale had spoken; for such was the accurate frankness of her manner and the candid openness of her look, that it was impossible to doubt her sincerity.

"And now," she asked, "are there any other particulars which I can give you?"

"None, my lady," responded the constable, after a few moments' reflection.

"Of course," she went on to say, "you will keep to yourself all that I have been telling you: for my daughter-in-law is so deeply attached to Lord Saxondale—and I do not mind confessing to you, she is exceedingly jealous. Therefore, if she heard that my son had ever been engaged in such a *liaison* with an opera-dancer, she would be very unhappy; and inasmuch as these circumstances cannot really have the slightest connection with any clue to the discovery of the assassins of those unfortunate women, it would be a mere wanton infliction of pain upon certain members of my family—indeed, upon us all—the particulars were flung abroad to be caught up by the greedy tongue of scandal."

"Your ladyship may depend upon my discretion," responded the constable as he rose to take his departure.

At this moment strange sounds reached the ears of Lady Saxondale.

and the constable—ejaculations loud and vehement—hurried and excited cries, as if the castle were on fire, or as if an attack were being made by banditti and the household were being summoned to resistance. Her ladyship started up with some suspicion of a new calamity: the constable listened with all his ears, as if thinking that such a disturbance must more or less regard his own official functions.

Suddenly the door of the library burst open; and Lucilla, rushing in, exclaimed, "Oh, my lady! thieves—robbers—burglars—murderers—in the tapestry-rooms!"

Lady Saxondale's vague suspicion was thus confirmed in a moment; and she grew pale as death. That she should do so, appeared by no means unnatural either to Lucilla or the constable,—considering the announcement which was thus abruptly made: but little did they comprehend the real reason which she had for being so affrighted.

"Thieves?" ejaculated the officer: and he sprang to the door.

Lady Saxondale, quickly recovering her self-possession,—or rather startled into it by the sudden consciousness of some new and frightful danger—sprang after the constable. They hurried up the staircase. On the landing and in one of the diverging corridors, some of the servants were speeding along: Edmund and Adelaide, previously alarmed by the cries, had issued forth from the drawing-room.

"What is it? what is it?" they demanded, as if speaking in one breath, and in a very excited manner: though perhaps the young nobleman was far more alarmed than his wife.

"Thieves!" cried Lucilla, who had followed Lady Saxondale and the constable.

"In the tapestry-rooms, my lord! — in the tapestry-rooms, my lady!" ejaculated one of the footmen. "The steward, the butler, and several others have shouted for assistance from the passage-windows on the western side!"

Edmund rushed back into the drawing room—snatched up a poker—and coming forth again, followed the rest towards the tapestry-rooms, taking good care however to be as much in the rear as possible: for, as the reader is already aware, he was very far from being the bravest person in existence. As for Adelaide—she, much more

courageous, had fallen into the stream, —keeping pace with the constable and her mother-in-law.

From this hurried description, an idea may be formed of the confusion and excitement which prevailed; and when we add that several of the servants carried lights in their hands, which flamed and oscillated as they were borne rapidly along, it may be well conceived that the spectacle was altogether calculated to sustain that sensation of wild interest and alarm. The constable, rushing onward, soon outstripped most of the domestics: Lady Saxondale kept close behind him: and Adelaide was not far distant. In this manner, the corridors and passages were soon threaded; and as they entered the western side of the castle, the sounds of loud voices, speaking in an excited manner, and emanating from the chapel, guided them all thither.

On entering that place, the spectacle which burst on the view of Lady Saxondale, was Chiffin the Cannibal struggling desperately with the steward, the butler, and two of the footmen. These four, however, had got too strong a hold upon him and were maintaining their grasp too tenaciously, either to allow the ruffian to escape or to do them much harm. His heavy boots certainly inflicted a few severe kicks upon their shins: but his arms were held fast—and when he endeavoured to butt at them, and even to bite, with all the ferocity of a savage beast, they were perfectly strong enough as well as sufficiently brave and resolute to retain him in their clutch. The head-constable, now darting forward, put an end to the fellows's desperate struggles, by seizing his legs and thus causing him to fall heavily on the pavement of the chapel—a proceeding which well nigh brought down with equal force those who held him.

No sooner was Chiffin the Cannibal thus prostrate, when handkerchiefs were promptly put in requisition to bind his limbs; and the ruffian was now overcome and powerless. As he lay flat on his back, he cast his grim savage looks around: his eyes encountered those of Lady Saxondale; and not quicker is the lighting flash athwart the sky, than was the glance which she flung upon him, significantly bidding him to remain quiet and hold his peace. There was promise in that look; and the thought darted into Chiffin's mind, that it would be much

better for him to keep silent, and not proclaim to those present his acquaintance with her ladyship,—as by so doing, he would only convert her into an enemy, whereas she might possibly serve him as a friend.

"Now, make the fellow sit up," exclaimed the constable, "while we determine how he is to be disposed of: for I presume he was found as an intruder here, and is but little likely to give a good account of himself."

The domestics lifted the Cannibal up, and placed him on a stone bench against one of the walls. At this instant Lord Saxondale entered the chapel; and the moment his eyes lighted upon the Cannibal, an ejaculation of astonishment escaped his lips: for he at once recognised the man who had delivered him from imprisonment at Dr. Ferney's house. The looks of all present instantaneously settled upon the young nobleman, his mother being as much astonished as the rest: for she knew not that Chiffin was the author of his release—neither was she aware that her son and that ruffian could have ever met before.

"Now then," growled the Cannibal, as an idea suddenly struck him, "you will perhaps let me go, when his lordship tells you that I have done him a service in my time; and it was natural enough that I should come here to ask for a recompense."

"Ah, taht voice!" cried Lucilla, who at the moment entered the chapel,—she having kept completely in the rear of the living stream. "That voice! Yes—it is the same!"

The domestics at once understood what Lucilla meant; and the head-constable glanced towards her ladyship for instructions, or at least for some suggestion what course was now to be adopted, inasmuch as her son did not deny Chiffin's assertion that he lay under an obligation to him.

"You hold your tongue, young o'man," said the Cannibal, addressing himself to Lucilla. "You never saw or heard me before; I know! And his lordship will very soon tell you all that I am a highly respectable gentleman, although somewhat under a cloud at present."

"Yes—it is perfectly true," exclaimed Edmund, "that this man did me a great service"—then thinking that it would seem very odd if he did not specifically

mention what it was, he added, "When I was shut up in a certain place the other day he helped me out of it."

"All this appears so very extraordinary," observed the head-constable of Gainsborough, "that it must be calmly and deliberately looked into. In the first place, I should like to know under what circumstances the man was discovered within these walls?"

"I will explain," said the steward. "In consequence of something which took place a few weeks back, I have considered it to be my duty to visit the shut-up apartments on this side of the building every evening; and as there are a great many rooms to inspect—and moreover, as one does not exactly like to come here alone—I have usually been accompanied by three or four of the other domestics. Well, on coming into the chapel just now, I thought I heard the sound of footsteps retreating into the cloister. I cried out for my comrades to hasten hither. They came, and we discovered this fellow crouching behind one of the monuments. Three of us tried to drag him out, while another fastened to the passage-window—threw it open and shouted for assistance: for we did not know what there might be more of them concealed in the place. The fellow struggled desperately, as you may have seen."

"But tell me," said the constable, "what circumstances you allude as having induced you to visit these rooms?—what did the young woman mean by her ejaculation which seemed to imply that she recognised this individual's voice?"

"One word, sir," exclaimed Lord Saxondale, now thinking it high time to interfere. "It appears that his lordship, my son, has received a service from this person's hands; and as he himself has observed, it was natural he should come to ask for a reward. Perhaps he did not like to present himself in his usual manner at the castle-gate, and therefore obtained a stealthy entrance in the hope of finding an opportunity to speak to his lordship."

"Yes—that's exactly what it growled Chiffin. "I was afraid that I rang at the bell, some of the powdered flunkies would order me just because I don't happen to have Sunday clothes on; and so I thought

"You had better hold your tongue," said the constable sternly. "I

assure you that although her ladyship, in the goodness of her heart may be inclined to put the most favourable construction on your proceeding, I am not to be equally misled. Young woman," he added, turning to Lucilla, "how is it that this man's voice was at once familiar to you?"

"Lucilla, do you hear the constable speak to you?" cried lady Saxondale; but she only thus addressed the maid, in order to have an opportunity and an excuse for accosting her; and hastening up to the spot where she was standing, she added in a hurried whisper, "Not a word of the real truth! Say it was a mistake!"

"Now, young woman," exclaimed the constable, "don't you hear that your mistress orders you to speak out? You need not be afraid: this man can do you no harm now."

"I think I can tell the story of her," observed the steward, naturally fancying that Lucilla was cowed and overawed by the terror of the Cannibal's presence. "The fact is, sir," he went on to say, addressing the head-constable, "there was a sort of burglarious entrance effected here a few weeks back: the maid there was alarmed by the entrance of persons into the room where she slept; and now, as you perceive, she has recognised the voice of one of them."

The steward did not at the time remember the injunction which he himself, as well as all the other servants had received, from Mr. Denison and Mr. Hawkshaw not to give publicity to the incident which he had been explaining. In the excitement of the present circumstance he utterly lost sight of that injunction.

"This grows very serious, observed he head-constable: and now he surveyed Chiffin more attentively than he had previously done. "Either I have seen you before," he went on to say, in a sort of musing tone; "or else I have read a very accurate description of you—"

"No, not of me, sir," responded the Cannibal: "it's quite a mistake. I am an honest hard-working man."

"What is your name? where do you live? and can you get anybody to speak to your character?" demanded the constable.

"My name is Brown, sir. I live in London when I'm at home—Ask his lordship there whether I ain't a very respectable man?"

"Faith! I know nothing at all about you," ejaculated Saxondale, with a supercilious hauteur. "All I know is that you delivered me out of a certain place; and if I had met you, and you had asked for a reward, I should certainly have given it."

Meanwhile the head-constable had been scrutinizing Chiffin with still more minuteness, until his original suspicion was confirmed—that in some way or another the fellow, both by his features and his dress, was not altogether unfamiliar to him. Recollecting that he had a bundle of certain papers in his possession, he drew them forth: and stepping somewhat aside, began turning them over one after the other, by the aid of candle which he beckoned to one of the footmen to hold close for the purpose.

"Come, my lord," said Chiffin, now getting very uneasy, "do speak a good word in my favour. Don't be ungrateful on account of what I did for your lordship."

But at this moment an ejaculation burst from the lips of the head-constable—an ejaculation of mingled horror and astonishment: and then, as suddenly resuming his wonted official composure, he said, "There is not the slightest necessity for carrying this investigation any farther. The man is my prisoner on a far more serious charge than any which might at first be brought against him. His name is Chiffin—and he is a murderer!"

Cries of horror burst from the lips of many present. The Cannibal, perceiving that he was recognised from a printed description which the head-constable had in his possession, said not another word—but reflected gloomily within himself upon the chances of Lady Saxondale endeavouring to do anything to save him.

"It now remains for consideration," the constable went on to say, "how we can best dispose of the fellow until the morning: for I should not like the risk of taking him away while it is dark—he would endeavour to escape."

"No—let the constable have his own way," Lady Saxondale hastened to observe. "He knows best; and he is responsible for the safe custody of his prisoner."

The official reflected for a few moments. He thought to himself that as Chiffin was such a desperate character

length : and it terminated with a spiral ascent of steps, all of the hardest stone. Up these did Lady Saxondale mount ; and in a few minutes she entered a long narrow apartment—or rather an enclosure of solid masonry—in which were the stone *mausolea* enclosing the coffins of those long-dead ancestors of the Saxondale family whose monuments were in the cloister above. For this vault—if such it could be termed, which was not underground—was precisely beneath the cloister itself, and exactly corresponding with it in dimensions. Several loop-holes on the western side—namely, the one overlooking the river—admitted the currents of fresh air. Awful was the silence and deadly the chill which prevailed in this place,—a silence fitted for the place of tombs—a chill such as that which sweeps from the sounding sea-lashed shores of Labrador. Lady Saxondale shuddered again—but it was more with the cold than with fear : for this woman of the most powerful mind, feared her crimes far more on account of what the living might do to her a the consequences thereof, than for any superstitious terrors which their memory might conjure up.

The stone *mausolea* enclosing the coffins of the long-dead ancestors of the house of Saxondale, stood in due order along the walls : and in the middle of the place was an ascent of stone steps reaching up to the ceiling—a height of about seven feet. In that stone ceiling, or roof, they appeared to terminate. Lady Saxondale ascended a few of these steps, until her head nearly touched the masonry above : and then, with the lamp, she carefully examined the stonework which was thus overhead. An iron knob set in a slight hollow of one of the stones, soon arrested her gaze : and against this knob did she press her hand firmly. It yielded somewhat to her touch ; the stonework began slowly to move over-head—until at length an aperture was formed large enough for her to pass through. She ascended ; and in a few moments stood in the cloister leading out of the chapel. The huge colossal figure of the armed warrior had turned almost completely round : for it moved upon a vertical pivot, and the base of its pedestal had thus been contrived to form that secret means of communication between the cloister and the place of tombs.

Lady Saxondale passed on towards the chapel—but slowly and cautiously ;

for she was fearful lest the Cannibal, on perceiving a light approaching, might in an access of superstitious alarm give vent to an ejaculation that would reach the ear of the constable keeping watch on the other side of the chapel door. But the man whom she came thus to succour, was as little prone to superstitious fears as herself ; and moreover, he had all along been expecting some assistance on the part of her ladyship—though he had been bewildering himself in conjectures how it could be possibly afforded, or from what quarter it would come. Nevertheless, being to a certain extent prepared, Chiffin no sooner caught a glimpse of the first glimmering rays which the lamp threw into the chapel, as Lady Saxondale approached from the cloister—than he knew full well who was nigh at hand.

We should observe that the villain had been so firmly and effectually bound with the handkerchiefs which had been fastened on his arms and legs, that all his endeavours to rid himself of those bonds had proved ineffectual : and he had therefore remained on the stone bench where the constable and the domestics had deposited him. As Lady Saxondale emerged from the cloister and came into his presence, his features expanded into a look of grim satisfaction ; and really, if Chiffin were ever capable of a grateful sentiment, he experienced it now towards one who did not desert him in the hour of his most bitter need. She placed her finger upon her lips to enjoin silence ; and then with the knife which she had brought, proceeded to cut the handkerchiefs which so firmly bound him. In a few moments he was thus far free.

Motioning him to gather up the severed kerchiefs and take them with him,—so that his disappearance from the chapel might in the morning seem all the more mysterious, and be all the more incomprehensible,—she led the way back towards the statue ; and the Cannibal started in astonishment on perceiving that this colossal figure had turned almost completely round, and in thus moving away from the spot it was wont to occupy, had disclosed a small square aperture. Lady Saxondale descended first : and on reaching the bottom of the steps in the place of tombs, held the lamp in such a manner as to aid the Cannibal

in following her. She then ascended a few of the steps again; and by once more pressing the knob, made the image turn round into its proper place—the pedestal again hermetically sealing the secret aperture.

"Follow me," she said to the Cannibal: and these were the first words that were spoken from the instant she had appeared in his presence on this occasion.

"I am uncommon obliged to your ladyship for thus thinking of an old pal," responded Chiffin, whose heart was exultant: for he already felt as if he breathed the fresh air of freedom. "But about that there little business you was coming to speak to me of——"

"Enough! it cannot be done now," interrupted Lady Saxondale in a peremptory manner—and not without a feeling of intense disgust at the familiarity with which the coarse ruffian addressed her. "You have not a moment to lose: you must make the best of your way hence. Without halting must you speed so long as the darkness favours you: for there will be a loud hue and cry, and doubtless a fierce pursuit in the morning."

"All right, my lady," responded Chiffin: "depend upon it I will show 'em a clean pair of heels. There isn't no manner of mistake about that."

"Ah! one word, by the bye!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, as if struck by a sudden recollection. "It appears, then, that you were the person who liberated my son, Lord Saxondale, from Dr. Ferney's house?"

"Yes, ma'am—I had that honour: and uncommon neat it was done, too, I can tell you. I suppose he was locked up unbeknown to you?"

"Silence—and speak not save in answer to my questions," interrupted Lady Saxondale imperiously. "Now, tell me, by whom were you engaged to accomplish this achievement?"

"Two gentlemen, one of whom was a foreigner,—a mounseer, I should say by the cut of him."

"Ah! and his name?" cried Lady Saxondale.

"I don't know it. His friend's name was Lawson; and lives in Clifford Street, Bond Street."

"But this Frenchman—was he a young and handsome man?" inquired Lady Saxondale.

"Yes—a matter of five or six-and-twenty, I should say: tall—slender—but uncommon well made. He wore

a black moustachio. I hadn't an idea that a Frenchman could be such a tidy looking feller."

"It is the same; there can be no doubt of it—the Count de St. Gerard!" thought Lady Saxondale to herself: then speaking aloud, she added, "And these two gentlemen, you say, employed you to liberate my son? Tell me the circumstances."

Chiffin accordingly explained how he encountered the two gentlemen at the *Three Cudgers*—how they engaged him to proceed to the neighbourhood of Dr. Burdett's to *reconnoitre*—how he discovered that Lord Saxondale had been removed to Dr. Ferney's—and how it was arranged that he could accomplish the young nobleman's liberation. Chiffin went on to explain by what means he had effected the purpose—how a post-chaise was in readiness in Hanover Square—how Mr. Lawson and the French gentleman, both muffled in cloaks, were on the spot—and how Lawson exchanged a few words with Lord Saxondale."

"And the Frenchman," exclaimed Lady Saxondale,—“did he speak to my son?”

"No—not a word," responded Chiffin "I remember he kept himself altogether apart, standing on one side and merely looking on."

"Recollect, if you can, what Mr. Lawson said to my son."

"He merely told him that he didn't want no thanks; and it wasn't necessary to give any explanations. Ah! I remember—Mr. Lawson also told his lordship that he was to get off into Lincolnshire as quick as possible, to join his wife there, and she would give him all explanations. Yes—and something else too," continued the Cannibal, as the circumstances came back by degrees to his memory; "Mr. Lawson said that you was in London—that your son's wife had a conversation with you—and that it was absolutely necessary for him to reach Saxondale Castle as quick as possible. And this was all that took place on the occasion."

"Enough!" muttered Lady Saxondale: and then after a few moments' reflection she added aloud, "Come—we must move onward. Follow me."

She again led the way, holding the lamp in her hand. Down the spiral staircase they went: the stone passage was threaded—and the little low door gave them egress into the quadrangle. But we should observe that ere this

door was again opened, her ladyship extinguished the lamp. The threshold being crossed, she re-locked the door: and with her handkerchief carefully wiped over the spot where the key-hole was set, so that in case any of the oil should have oozed forth, the traces thereof might be effectually made to disappear.

And now she guided the Cannibal across the court-yard; and they entered the castle. Again was the lamp lighted:—for a few moments they halted in the entrance hall; and there Lady Saxondale placed the money-parcel in the Cannibal's hand, intimating how much it contained.

"For heaven's sake," she continued, in a low whisper, "get out of the country as quick as you can. Remember, if you be recaptured, I can do nothing more for you. And should it happen that you are thus unfortunate—should you, in a word, be retaken—let me hope that whatever may ensue, you will have a sufficient sense of becoming gratitude to maintain the strictest silence as to all that has at any time passed between you and me."

"Don't be alarmed, my lady," replied Chiffin as he eagerly clutched the money thus given to him. "If I do come to dance upon nothing at Tuck up Fair, I will be mum as a mouse about your ladyship."

Lady Saxondale made no observation in reply to this assurance, which was given in terms so horribly ludicrous and revoltingly jocular but she proceeded at once to afford the man egress from the castle. He disappeared from her view in the darkness of the night: and she now breathed freely as she retraced her way to her own apartment.

At an early hour in the morning—long before it was light—a groom, mounted on horseback, set off for Gainsborough; and by about nine o'clock he returned, accompanied by a post-chaise containing four constables. They came well armed and provided with hand cuffs: for the groom had failed not to tell them what a desperate character was to be dealt with.

The head-constable had remained all night at his post in the passage where the sofa was placed against the chapel-door. He had not slept a wink; and if every now and then he felt a sensation of drowsiness coming over him, he had risen to pace to and fro and shake it off.

He had scarcely touched the wine which was furnished him; and he had chiefly employed the long weary hours in thinking of the manner in which he might best lay out the reward he was to obtain for handing over the formidable and ferocious murderer to the authorities in London. He did not choose to run the slightest risk of losing him by opening the chapel door until the arrival of his subordinates from Gainsborough. When they came, they were at once conducted to the passage where their principal awaited them; and three or four of the men-servants of the household accompanied them not merely from motives of curiosity to have another glimpse of the terrible miscreant, but likewise as an additional guarantee against any possible demonstration of violence on his part.

The sofa was drawn away—the door was opened—the head-constable, with loaded pistols in his hands, advanced into the chapel: but Chiffin was not on the seat where he had been deposited. This circumstance excited no suspicion: bound though he were, he might have managed to drag himself away to some other spot. Into the cloister did the head-constable and his followers accordingly pass: but no Chiffin was to be seen. They looked behind the monuments: the prisoner was not there. Consternation and dismay appeared upon the countenances of the head-constable and his subordinates: but one of the footmen suggested that there could be no doubt the object of their search would be found in the vestiary. The door was thrown open: but still no Chiffin. That he could have descended into the vaults, was not possible,—inasmuch as the huge bolt of the door leading thither from the vestiary, was firm in its socket. Every nook and corner was searched; but still no Chiffin! The constables and the footmen surveyed each other in downright dismay, mingled with bewilderment. How could he have escaped! Not even the handkerchiefs with which he had been bound, were to be seen. The windows were examined: not a pane of glass was broken—not an iron bar was wrenched out.

Well indeed might those present at this fruitless search, be confounded! That a man whose limbs were so firmly fastened, should have thus disappeared without leaving behind the slightest trace of the mode and manner

of his flight, seemed to be invested with a preternatural mystery. Had he evaporated into thin air? or had Satan come to claim his due, thereby anticipating the hangman's work? Not for a moment was it suspected that the head-constable had connived at his escape: for his subordinates knew him too well to entertain such an idea;—and moreover, they, as well as the footmen, at once perceived that if he had done so he would have been literally flinging away the reward offered for the fellow's apprehension: as it could not be for an instant supposed that Chiffin had, concealed about his person, a larger sum than the amount thus offered, so as to have been enabled to tempt the head-constable with such a superior bribe.

The mystery was indeed, as Lady Saxondale had foreseen, perfectly beyond the most extravagant and the wildest of conjecture. The news spread through the castle; and the utmost excitement prevailed. Her ladyship, as a matter of course, affected the supremest astonishment; and she accompanied the constables in a fresh search throughout the chapel and the cloister. But all was in vain, as she very well knew it would be; and the discomfited myrmidons of justice took their way back to Gainsborough, not without the idea that the Evil One must indeed have had a hand in so mysterious a business.

CHAPTER CLVII.

THE LAST PLOT.

Two days after the incidents which we have just related, Lady Saxondale said to Edmund and Adelaide after breakfast, "To-morrow morning I purpose to leave you. The warfare is at an end between us. That we can part with very friendly feelings, is not to be supposed: but at least let us separate in peace, and with a resolve to think on either side as little of the unpleasant past as possible."

"Well, mother," answered Edmund, "I don't want to vex or annoy you, although there are many things which might induce me to do so."

"No," observed Adelaide; "we will not have more angry words:"—but she could not repress a look of exultation at the thought that she was now completely triumphant, and that Lady Saxondale was utterly humiliated.

"Yes—to-morrow," said the latter, "immediately after breakfast, I shall leave Saxondale Castle—most likely for ever! It is my intention to repair to the Continent, and to live in tranquil seclusion for the remainder of my days. Again therefore do I beseech that the last few hours we are to spend in each other's society, may be embittered as little as possible by allusions to the past."

Her ladyship thus spoke in order to throw Edmund and Adelaide completely off their guard: and for the purpose of still more convincing them of her sincerity, she wore a desponding, a dejected and a humiliated look, as if feeling herself completely vanquished and prostrated. But all the while she had a certain plan agitating in her thoughts,—a plan which, if successfully carried out, would not merely rid her of Adelaide but would place Edmund completely in her power. It was a hideous and a diabolical plan—the most fiendlike which had ever yet entered the mind of this desperate and unscrupulous woman. If there be degrees in guilt—if there be shades and hues, some deeper and darker than others, in the sphere of criminality—then assuredly had Lady Saxondale prepared to stain her soul with the blackest and the deadliest of all.

After having spoken at the breakfast table in the manner already described, she wandered about from room to room, collecting such of her trinkets as she fancied to take with her, or might seem to fancy for such a purpose: and in short, she appeared occupied with her preparations for departure. But all the while she was watching for an opportunity to speak to Edmund alone; and this opportunity was somewhat difficult to be obtained, inasmuch as Adelaide kept almost incessantly with her husband. But just before luncheon-time, Adelaide ascended to her chamber to make some little change in her toilet; and Lady Saxondale, anticipating this movement, watched her from her own room as she passed along the passage. She then glided to the apartment where she hoped to encounter Edmund: nor was she disappointed—for she found him there alone.

"Edmund—dearest Edmund," she hastily said, adopting a tone and manner of affectionate kindness,—“it is absolutely necessary I should have half an-hour's conversation with you. You know not the importance of the matter

on which I thus seek to enlighten you—Yes, terribly enlighten you! You are in danger—you stand upon a precipice—and I alone can save you!”

When Lady Saxondale first began speaking with that air of seeming kindness, Edmund gave one of his insolently supercilious smiles, and was about to tell her “not to bother him:” but the concluding words that thus met his ears, and the awfully impressive tone and look of warning which accompanied them, struck terror to his heart.

“What do you mean, mother?” he said. “Pray don’t keep me in suspense.”

“I cannot tell you now. Adelaide will return in a few minutes; she must not see us speaking together!”

“Then is it about her?” demanded Edmund, nervously.

“Do not question me now. I will tell you all presently: you shall *then* judge whether what I have to say is important or not. But I charge you not to breathe a syllable to your wife! Do not let her perceive there is any new secret between us! You must give me an opportunity—”

“I know how!” quickly interrupted Edmund, who was most seriously frightened. “When I go up to dress for dinner, I will steal out of my toilet-room and come to your chamber.”

“I will be there,” answered Lady Saxondale. “And now compose yourself!—be as usual towards Adelaide! You know not how much depends upon your behaviour in this respect!”

Having thus spoken, Lady Saxondale hurried from the room, and flitted back to her own chamber. There she remained about ten minutes until the bell rang for luncheon, when she proceeded to the apartment where it was served. Edmund and Adelaide were already there; and a glance showed her that the former was maintaining his wonted demeanour towards his wife—so that her ladyship felt assured she had succeeded in thoroughly frightening the young nobleman into silence. When the repast was over, Lady Saxondale retired altogether to her own chamber; and remained there, occupied with her thoughts, until about half-past six o’clock,—when the door opened, and Edmund made his appearance.

“Now, mother, for heaven’s sake what is it?” he exclaimed, his looks showing how strong was the impression

which her words had made upon him in the middle of the day.

“You must be clam, Edmund—you must summon all your courage and all your self-possession to your aid! Indeed, you never in all your life required the exercise of the strongest power of self-control so much as you do at present.”

“Go on, mother! I will do as you tell me! See, I am composed. Now, what is it?”

“Did you ever hear, Edmund, of a certain Count de St. Gerard?”—and as Lady Saxondale thus spoke, she fixed her large dark eyes penetratingly upon the young man’s mean and ignoble countenance, to ascertain the impression which the mention of that name would create.

“St. Gerard? Yes, to be sure!” he answered, a strong feeling of jealousy at once springing up within him.

“And you have read—or you have heard,” continued her ladyship, “the full particulars of Adelaide’s trial in Paris, upwards of two years ago.”

“Yes—I have read it, every syllable!”

“And the name of the Count de St. Gerard figured therein?”

“It did, mother. But what then? Was it not shown—?”

“Never mind what *seemed* to be shown,” interrupted Lady Saxondale impressively. “I tell you that the Count de St. Gerard was Adelaide’s paramour!”

“If you thought it?” echoed Lady Saxondale. “I tell you it is true! and what is more, that same Count de St. Gerard had followed Adelaide to England—and he has written to her.”

“Mother, this is some tale of your’s to answer some new purpose!”—and Edmund stopped short, for his teeth were set suddenly with a cold paroxysm of concentrated rage.

“Foolish boy! what object have I *now* to gain in deceiving you! Am I not to leave Lincolnshire to-morrow—and to quit the country in a few days? It is your very life which is at stake! I tell you the Count de St. Gerard is in England—and she who murdered one husband for the sake of her paramour, will not scruple to do the same by another! Edmund, are you aware who was the author of your release from Dr. Ferney’s house?”

“I don’t know,” quickly responded the young nobleman. “That Man Chiffin—”

"Yes—but by whom, think you, he was employed?" interrupted Lady Saxondale. "The Count de St. Gerard! He was one of the two gentlemen whom you met in Hanover Square, where the post-chaise was in readiness."

"Ah!" ejaculated Edmund, quivering from head to foot with a cold terror. "Those two gentlemen were muffled in cloaks; one was evidently an Englishman—the other, I recollect, never spoke a syllable during the few moments we were together——"

"And that other who spoke not, and who stood a little aside," added Lady Saxondale, "was the Count de St. Gerard! Was he not a tall, slender young man—about six-and-twenty—of very genteel appearance—and wearing a black moustache?"

"True!" ejaculated Edmund, full of excitement. "But how know you all this?"

"What matter how it came to my knowledge?" demanded his mother: "you perceive that what I tell you is the truth. Nay, more—to speak candidly, I intercepted a letter from the Count to Adelaide——"

"Show it me!" cried Edmund, vehemently: and still was he quivering with the excitement of his jealous feelings.

"Nay—I have it not," responded her ladyship. "I resealed it, and suffered it to reach Adelaide's hands. It suited my purpose to do this."

"But what said the note?" inquired Edmund,

"It was such as a paramour would write to his mistress: it was couched in the most endearing terms—it left no doubt in my mind as to Adelaide's guilt in many respects—guilt as to the murder of her first husband—guilt as to her intercourse with St. Gerard—guilt as to her utter selfishness in inveigling you into a marriage—and guilt as to her intentions towards you!"

"And those intentions?" demanded the young nobleman, trembling more than he had ever heretofore done.

Lady Saxondale bent upon him a fearfully ominous look; and in a low but impressive manner, replied, "Her intentions are to treat you as she treated her first husband—to take you off by poison!"

"My God!" muttered Edmund, staggering back with indescribable horror upon his ghastly pale countenance.

"Yes—and the vile woman," continued Lady Saxondale, inwardly chuckling as she saw how effectively her words struck the unfortunate Edmund blow upon blow,—“the vile woman has all along laughed at you!—she has ridiculed—she has mocked you—she despises and hates you. Her paramour's letter to her proved this much!"

"But wherefore did she not marry the Count de St. Gerard?" demanded Edmund quickly.

"Because he was not rich enough to support her in the extravagant style in which she is accustomed to live. She married you in order to obtain an income settled upon herself: and this she has got. Now—her purpose being fully served—she will make away with you, Edmund, that she may in due course become the wife of him whom she has all along loved!"

"But, mother, what you tell me is horrible—horrible!" and Edmund literally shivered in the excruciation of his agonized feelings. "Oh, I will fly from her!—No, I will order the lacqueys to turn her out——"

"Madman that you are!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, catching him by the arm as he was springing to the chamber-door: "do you think that a wily woman, such as she is, will not find means to accomplish her purpose even though you eject her? Yes—rest assured that sooner or later you would be taken off by some means or another!"

"My God, what am I to do?" and Edmund sank upon a chair, a prey to mingled feelings of jealous rage and horrible apprehensions. "But why," he suddenly exclaimed, "did she have me rescued from Dr. Ferney's?—would it not have suited her purpose to leave me there?"

"Must I explain everything, even to the minutest details?" demanded Lady Saxondale, impatiently: "can you not fathom anything for yourself? can you not penetrate a single one of her purposes? How could she make away with you while you were at Dr. Ferney's? was it not absolutely necessary for her to have you with her? and does not the fact of St. Gerard being the real author of your liberation, prove the concert which exists between him and Adelaide? Nay, I will tell you more!—it was in consequence of reading the intercepted letter, that I discovered the plan which was contemplated for your deliverance;

and therefore did I have you hastily removed from Dr. Burdett's to Dr. Ferney's."

"Oh! what am I to do? what am I to do?" ejaculated the miserable Edmund, wringing his hands: then in the abject wretchedness of his feelings, he threw himself at Lady Saxondale's feet, saying, "Save me, mother! You told me just now that you alone can save me!—pray do it—and I will never go against your wishes any more!"

"When I said I would save you, Edmund," she answered, compelling him to rise up from his suppliant posture, "I meant that I would counsel you how to save yourself."

"I will go to a magistrate—I will hurry off to Hawkshaw or to Denison—I will go to the constable at Gainsborough—anything to get rid of this dreadful woman!"—and he was fearfully excited.

"Insensate boy! will you be tranquillized?" exclaimed her ladyship sternly though in her heart rejoicing with a fiendish satisfaction at these violent gusts of passion, which showed how effectually she had instilled the poison of jealousy and infused the influence of terror into his soul. "What would you say to a magistrate? It would be a mere vague and unsupported accusation. I could not stand forward as a witness—Alas! now you perceive the consequences of having done your best to place me in that woman's power! But is it possible, Edmund, you have been all along so infatuated as never to entertain the slightest misgiving as to her intentions towards you?"

"Misgiving?" echoed Edmund: "I have seldom been free from it! I have been haunted by vague terrors: my fears have followed me in my dreams—I have fancied that I was encircled in the coils of a monstrous serpent—"

"And as you live," cried Lady Saxondale, "It is a serpent in whose power you have placed yourself! Know you not that the most venomous of snakes have the fairest and loveliest of skins? Oh, my poor boy!" she added, pretending to be affected unto tears, and to be seized with a sudden revival of love towards one whom she in reality hated with the most cordial detestation,—"you must be guided by my counsel! it is for me to save you!"

"Speak, mother—speak!" exclaimed Edmund, completely beguiled by the

tone, the look, and the manner she had assumed.

"You see the position in which you are placed," continued her ladyship. "Adelaide menaces your life: if she should fail, St. Gerard will take it. They have vowed between them that you shall perish by poison, or fall beneath the assassin's knife. Adelaide, who murdered one husband, is familiar with crime and all its means and resources, and will not scruple to attempt the life of a second husband. But if she fail, her paramour is ready to take up the enterprise; and he who so well knew how and where to find a ready agent to deliver you from the mad-house, will know how and where to find the same or another to have you waylaid and assassinated."

"Mother, speak!—what am I to do?" asked Edmund, in a deep hollow voice.

"What are you to do? Are you a man—and do you not in the first place pant for revenge against the woman who has beguiled you with her treachery, who has dishonoured you with her profligacy, and who now meditates your death?"

"Yes—revenge! revenge!" muttered Edmund, whose fiendish malignity of disposition was terribly excited.

"Well then, revenge!" resumed her ladyship; "and at the same instant you consummate your revenge, may you rid yourself for ever of this demoness in human shape who seeks your life!"

"Ah!" ejaculated Edmund: but again he quivered all over as he said, "You mean, mother, that I must take *her* life!"

"And wherefore not?" demanded Lady Saxondale. "Is it not in self-defence? If she attacked you with a sword, would you not snatch it from her grasp, if you could, and slay her therewith?—and is she not now meditating by insidious means to take your life? Are not all the blandishments she lavishes upon you, so many subtleties to lull you into a false security? Shall you not therefore be justified in tearing the weapons from her grasp—turning round upon her suddenly—and dealing her the death which she purposes to overtake you?"

"Would you have me poison her?" inquired Edmund, with a look of unfeigned horror.

"Aye—poison her! Why not? But no," added Lady Saxondale more slowly, as she reflected that after the tragedy of Mabel Stewart, a recurrence of a sudden death in the family might seem suspicious. "Some other plan

must be adopted. But first of all, Edmund—tell me, are you resolved?"

"I am, mother!" was the response. "It is my only alternative—the only means by which I can possibly save myself."

"You never spoke anything more truly. Now look you, Edmund: the River Trent rolls deep near the bridge—and the banks are high. A female, if plunged into those waters, and encumbered by her apparel, could not scramble up the shore, if he who thrust her in was prompt and resolute in driving her back. She must drown—she must die! Nothing could save a woman in such a case! Well, even now you scarcely seem to understand me: you gaze upon me with a sort of vacancy, as if I must be explicit in every detail, even the minutest. Then be it so!"

"Proceed, mother" said the young nobleman, now quivering nervously again.

"To-morrow," resumed Lady Saxondale,—“yes, to-morrow, I say; for delay is dangerous, and you know not how soon after I am gone, the drop of poison may be poured into your coffee or your wine—or how, when you are sleeping, the phial of venom may be placed to your lips——”

"Horror!" groaned the miserable young man, whose feelings were worked up to just the very pitch which Lady Saxondale desired.

"Yes—to-morrow, I say," she continued,—“when I have taken my departure, you and Adelaide can walk out together. She will be all endearing blandishments—you must be all apparent confidence; and you will chuckle, and rejoice, and laugh together, at having got rid of me. You will lead Adelaide along the bank of the river: there is a beaten pathway—and it is pleasant walking there on these fine frosty days. When at a sufficient distance from the castle, and beyond the bridge—where the water runs so deep, the stream is so wide, and the banks are so high—you will sweep your eyes around to assure yourself that no observer is near, and you will suddenly thrust her into the river. Need I say any more? Her cries will echo around: you may raise shouts of seeming horror and vociferate for help. If those shouts are heard, so much the better: the more effective gloss will be thrown over the deed. In any case, when you see that she has sunk the third time—remember,

Edmund, the *third* time!—you may rush away—you may hasten back with all the appearance of frenzy and frantic grief to the castle—you may proclaim that a terrible accident has deprived you of your beloved wife. Now, have you the courage of a man—— Yes, you *must* have when you think of all your wrongs! And I warn you to be deluded not by her blandishments! The more endearing they may become, rest assured the nearer is the hour when the fatal poison is to be administered. It is for you to anticipate it:—it is for you to save yourself by making away with *her*——Aye, and avenge yourself at the same time! Will you do it?"

"I will, mother!"—and Lady Saxondale saw that Edmund was resolved.

"But in the meanwhile, everything depends upon the demeanour you assume. Remember, she is keen and penetrating: a word or a look will betray you!—and if so, your life, even *before* my departure, is not worth a single hour's purchase. Now go!—return to your dressing-room—and when we meet at the dinner-table, let me see that you for once in your life can model yourself to the exigences of the occasion, and maintain the strictest control over your feelings."

Lady Saxondale and Edmund separated for the present,—he returning to his toilet-chamber, she remaining in her own apartment,—he to compose his feelings as well as he was able, she to chuckle over the detestable scheme which she had devised and which appeared to have every prospect of terminating as terribly and as tragically as she could wish. The reader cannot have failed to perceive how artfully and how skilfully this designing woman had seized upon certain incidents—had given a different complexion to them—had tortured and twisted them, so as to suit her own purpose—and had accumulated a terrific mass of evidence against Adelaide. Bad though Edmund's wife herself was, yet was Lady Saxondale's story utterly devoid of foundation: for the Count de St. Gerard was not, nor ever had been, Adelaide's paramour, he was incapable of conniving at a murderous intent, much less of entertaining one to be executed by himself;—and Adelaide harboured not the slightest idea inimical to her husband's life.

Lady Saxondale, Edmund, and Adelaide met at the dinner-table; and

the first rapid searching glance which her ladyship threw upon them both, convinced her that Edmund was exercising more presence of mind than he had ever before displayed, and that his wife suspected nothing wrong. In the same manner did the evening pass away; and when they sought their chambers, Lady Saxondale said to herself, "I shall triumph yet."

But it cost Edmund a tremendous effort thus to cast a veil over his real feelings, and maintain his wonted demeanour towards his wife. He however succeeded in doing so. Firmly believing every syllable his mother had told him, because her statement appeared to be so fully borne out by a variety of facts within his own knowledge—he regarded Adelaide as an intending murderess in respect to himself; and therefore felt that his life depended wholly and solely on his own conduct and bearing towards her. Thus did the very desperation of his position, as he believed it to be, arm him with a kind of courage which he had never experienced before. But when he went to sleep, the horrors of his waking thoughts followed him in his dreams; and once again did he fancy that he was writhing in the immense coils of a fearful serpent tightening around him. So powerful were his convulsive movements—his spasmodic throes—his heavings, and tossings, and strugglings in his sleep, that his wife was awakened by them: and when, believing him to be labouring under the influence of some terrible night-mare, she kissed him, for it was her policy now to enchain him to her by the the tenderest blandishments,—his fevered imagination made him fancy that the reptile which encircled him, was licking him with its forked tongue, to cover him with its loathsome saliva previous to the process of deglutition. He awoke with a strong start and a wild cry; but fortunately, ere his wilder-senses became collected he gave utterance to no word which betrayed what was uppermost in his mind. Adelaide therefore still retained the belief that he had been labouring under the influence of a night-mare; and when he composed himself to slumber again, it was far less disturbed.

The morning came: Lady Saxondale, Edmund, and Adelaide met at the breakfast-table; and still was the first-mentioned of the three satisfied that the other two were in the same relative position as on the previous evening—namely,

that Edmund had said nothing to excite Adelaide's suspicions, and that she herself remained without the slightest mis-giving. The travelling carriage was ordered to be ready for Lady Saxondale at ten o'clock; and the moment for departure arrived.

"I am about to leave you, according to my promise," said her ladyship, addressing Edmund and Adelaide. "Farewell!"

She extended her hand to her daughter-in-law, who held it for an instant with a look of cold reserve: she then proffered it to Edmund, who pressed it far more warmly, as if in gratitude for the warning and the counsel she had given him on the preceding day, as well as a significant assurance that her advice should not be disregarded. She descended to the carriage,—Edmund and Adelaide accompanying her to the threshold of the castle, for the sake of appearances. She found an opportunity to dart one rapid look of deep meaning upon Edmund—and stepped into the vehicle.

It rolled away: and Adelaide whispered to her husband, as she accompanied him back to the drawing-room, "Your lady-mother has a fine day for her journey,"—the words being uttered with a smile of mingled irony and triumph.

"Yes, dearest Adelaide," answered Edmund,—"so fine that, if you please, you and I will enjoy it likewise for ourselves. We will ramble forth together; and while exchanging congratulations at having got rid of my mother, will discuss our plans for the future,"

CHAPTER CLVIII.

THE RIVER

LORD SAXONDALE and his wife rambled forth from the castle, the latter leaning on the arm of the former. Adelaide was now completely happy: she was entirely without a suspicion that her mother-in-law, ere taking her departure, had instilled such venom into Edmund's veins—or that a mine had been prepared, above which she was unconsciously to tread. She considered that the desperate warfare of plots and counterplots, duplicities and machinations, which had been waged between Edmund's

mother and herself, was now altogether at an end—that the former had been worsted—and that she therefore remained triumphant.

We have already said that the very desperation of Edmund's position, as he himself believed it to be, had served to endow him with a degree of fortitude which astonished even himself; that is to say, a particular kind of fortitude—the fortitude which enabled him to wear a mask upon his countenance in the presence of his wife, without betraying the secret thoughts and intents which were agitating within. Indeed, in this respect, his hypocrisy was now consummate; and as those who harbour treacherous intents, invariably assume some extreme feeling in order to veil them,—so was Edmund's manner kinder and more affectionate than ever towards Adelaide. She perceived this as they walked forth together—and naturally attributed it to satisfaction at his mother's departure.

"Now, my dear Edmund," said Adelaide, as she leant upon his arm, and gazed up with her wonted blandishment of look into his countenance;—"at length we are rid of that woman who sought to be such a terrible domestic-tyrant. I hope you will not be angry that I speak thus of your mother—"

"Angry?—no!" ejaculated Edmund: "how can I be angry, when for some time past I have looked upon her as my bitterest enemy?"

"Well, she is gone at length," observed Adelaide: "in a few days she will quit England—let us hope never to return. So long as she was here, I trembled for your safety, although I did my best to conceal my fears. You know not, dearest Edmund, how much I love you; and the heart which loves as fondly as mine, is naturally full of apprehensions at the slightest chance of danger to the object of such affection."

"And you do indeed love me as much as you say: my adored Adelaide?" asked Edmund, gazing upon her countenance! which never looked more beautiful than it did at this moment: for the fresh frosty air had heightened the colour upon her cheeks—and the sunny light of satisfaction and triumph was dancing in her eyes.

"Love you, Edmund? You know that I love you!" she murmured, modulating her tones so that the music

of her voice, of the melody of which she was fully conscious, might sink down with rapturous sensations into the depths of his soul. "Did I not love you from the very first moment we met?"

"Yes, yes—even as I loved you," he answered: but all the while he felt convinced in his own heart that every syllable she uttered, though glossed with honey, was nevertheless fraught with an envenomed hypocrisy.

On issuing forth from the castle, he had not immediately conducted her near the river,—but through the park, into the fields—and with an air as if it were a matter of indifference which way he went; so that in nothing should his conduct encourage the slightest suspicion in her mind. As they were proceeding along a narrow lane, they heard the sounds of a horse's feet approaching; and as a turn in the road almost immediately revealed the rider to their view, Edmund recognised Mr. Hawkshaw. It was a long time since the young nobleman had seen the Squire—never since he had last inhabited the castle some two or three years back, and when he might be described as a mere lad. He had not however sufficiently altered—and heaven knows had not so much improved in personal appearance—that Mr. Hawkshaw could fail to recognise him also. The recognition was therefore mutual; but while, on the one hand, Edmund saluted the Squire with a cordiality which might be regarded as an overture of friendship—the other returned his salutation with a frigid reserve. If Lord Saxondale had possessed the least degree of proper spirit, he would himself have demonstrated a studied coldness towards the individual who had so signally exposed his sister Juliana—withstanding that the sister was flagrantly and foully in the wrong. But Lord Saxondale had no such spirit: he had vanity and conceit—but no real pride in its loftiest and noblest sense,—and thus was it that, heedless of antecedent circumstances in respect to Hawkshaw and Juliana, he was now anxious enough to avail himself of the present opportunity to renew his acquaintance with one of the leading gentlemen of Lincolnshire.

Mr. Hawkshaw instantaneously comprehended how Lord Saxondale ought to have treated him in revenge for his conduct towards Juliana; and therefore despised him for acting otherwise. He was urging his steed past,—when

Saxondale, determined not to be thus almost "cut" by the Squire without an effort to amend matters, advanced a pace or two—stretched forth his hand—and exclaimed, "Well, Mr. Hawkshaw, it is some time since you and I met. I shall be very glad to see you at the Castle——But perhaps you were going there to call?"

"No, my lord—I was not," was the Squire's response, given with a marked emphasis; although at the same time he suffered Edmund to grasp the tips of two of his fingers, as he did not wish to be too pointed in his conduct.

"If you had been, we would have turned back with you," said the young nobleman. "Permit me to introduce you to Lady Saxondale——"

But at that moment the Squire gave another cold and distant bow—colder and more distant than even the first; and galloped onward.

"The unmannerly country bumpkin!" ejaculated Edmund, as Mr. Hawkshaw thus darted away upon his high-spirited steed.

"Do not vex yourself, my dearest husband," said Adelaide, again resuming all her most fascinating wiles, and putting forth the most seductive witcheries which her charms were so well calculated to display. "What care we for the society of the world, when we are all in all to each other?"

"True, dearest Adelaide!" returned Edmund, scarcely able to keep back an expression of bitterness from his countenance: for he thought that Hawkshaw's coldness was altogether on account of his wife, and not at all on account of himself, nor of the family to which he belonged.

The lane now led into a wider road; and Edmund knew that a little farther on there was another diverging lane, conducting towards the river. In this direction did he resolve to proceed. But scarcely had they entered the broader road, when the sounds of an approaching equipage reached their ears; and as it came in sight, Edmund, at once recognising the servants' liveries hastily said, "The Denisons' carriage!"

It was advancing at only a moderate pace—as Mr. and Mrs. Denison, with their eldest son and his wife, their daughter-in-law, were taking an airing. There was consequently a sufficient opportunity for the Saxondales to observe them—and for them to observe Edmund and his wife in

return. But what pen can describe the bitter mortification of the young nobleman, when he saw the occupants of that vehicle avert their heads in so marked and pointed a manner that there was no possibility of mistaking their intention to give him and Adelaide the cut direct! The equipage passed on its way; and Edmund, utterly humiliated, and quivering with rage, gave vent to some low-muttered imprecation. Again was his wife ready with cajoling blandishments; and he, fearful of exciting in her mind any suspicion of how hateful in every sense she had become to him, appeared to be soothed, and even affected to talk disdainfully and scornfully of "the wretched unmannerly beings who lived in that part of the country."

But if the terrible purpose with which Lady Saxondale had so skilfully imbued her son, had required strengthening, the malevolent intervention of Satan himself could not have conjured up incidents better calculated to achieve that end than these which had just arisen from accident. Too vain and conceited to be willing to admit that it could be in any way on his own account he was thus cut,—Edmund attributed his humiliation and discomfiture entirely to the presence of this woman to whom he had allied himself. In every way, therefore, had she become hateful to him,—hateful as one whom he regarded as being the wanton paramour of another—hateful as the murderess of her first husband—hateful as entertaining murderous intentions towards himself—hateful as the source of disgrace, opprobrium, and infamy, all of which were falling upon his own head. Nevertheless, he still maintained an outward appearance of kindness, affection, and love,—forcing himself even to chat the more gaily the nearer he drew his wife towards the river.

They entered upon the beaten pathway which ran along the bank. In their ramble they had made a partial circuit, which thus brought them back to within a mile of the castle: for it was at no great distance below the bridge that they entered upon the pathway which followed the course of the stream. Adelaide, as she leaned upon his arm, was nearest to the river; and as Edmund threw his eyes forward, he perceived a point about fifty yards ahead, at which he well recollected that the bank was higher

than elsewhere, and that the path skirted its very edge. He knew likewise that the water was there exceedingly deep; and not a cottage nor a hut was nigh. *That* was the spot he fixed upon to become the theatre of the terrific crime which his mother had suggested, and in the dread purpose of which so many circumstances had combined to strengthen him.

"Excellent fishing at this part of the river, in the season," he observed to Adelaide, thus suddenly breaking a brief interval of silence.

"And are you fond of angling?" she inquired. "If so, when the spring returns, we will ramble forth together—we will seek the most refreshing shades: you shall take your rod—I will bring a book; and thus will we while away the time."

"Yes—and it will be truly delightful," observed Edmund, who experienced such curious and almost horrible sensations, as he neared the particular spot, that he could not altogether conceal the excitement and agitation which possessed him.

"I am afraid, dearest Edmund," said his wife, perceiving the glitter of uneasiness in his eyes, "that you are still troubled by these incidents which have just now occurred? Pray think of them no more. You have rightly described the authors of those insults as persons of uncouth manners."

"Yes, yes—they are so," responded Edmund quickly: and he slackened the pace at which they were walking, as if to postpone as long as possible the fatal instant when the foul deed was to be done.

"Then, wherefore vex yourself on their account?" asked Adelaide, gazing up, with all the power of her assumed fondness, into his face.

"It is not so much on that account—it is not so much for them that I am annoyed——"

"On account of whom, dearest Edmund?"

"My own infernal folly!" he replied bitterly, and with startling suddenness.

"Your folly?"

"Yes—wretch!" and he hurled her into the stream.

A moment before, his looks had been swept around quick as if it were a lightning-flash that was thus circling the wintry landscape: no observer met his view—and thus at the instant the marked out spot was reached, was his purpose executed. A wild shriek thrilled forth

from Adelaide's lips, swiftly followed by a splash and heavy plunge; and for a few moments she disappeared from the view of the wretched murderer, who stood dismayed and horrified on the bank. The circling, and gurgling, and agitation of the water showed where the unfortunate woman was battling and struggling in the depths below. Suddenly she reappeared on the surface; and wild cries again rang forth.

"Edmund—murderer! Help! help! for God's sake help!"—and her countenance, distorted and absolutely hideous with the wild anguish and the dread horror depicted upon it, presented to his dismayed view a spectacle full well calculated to haunt him ever more.

Struggling and battling against the engulfing waters—carried downward by the stream—vainly did the miserable woman endeavour to reach the bank; and a second time did she disappear from the gaze of her murderer. The sudden sinking of that hideous ghastly countenance—a countenance which but a minute before was full of exquisite beauty—smote him as it were with a sense of relief: yes, *smote* him—for the revulsion of feeling was marvellously abrupt from consternation and horror; to comparative presence of mind. Then did Edmund recollect another portion of his mother's instructions: and rushing to and fro along the bank with every appearance of the most frenzied terror, he shouted for help. All of a sudden his foot slipped—and in he fell. Fortunately for him, however, his hand instantaneously encountered the root of a tree, spreading out beneath the water, from the bank; and he was enabled to scramble safely back to a sure footing upon the land.

"Help, help! in mercy's sake, help! Edmund—villain—murderer—My God, help!" were again the wild cries which rang thrillingly forth in a voice of piercing agony, as for the second time Adelaide rose to the surface.

"Edmund, full of horror at the fearful peril which he himself had but that instant escaped from, leant against the tree for support; his brain whirled—he appeared as if in the midst of an appalling dream. Again did the cries of his wife cease: again had she disappeared in the depths of the Trent. More than a minute now elapsed ere she rose again: then it was but for a moment—naught but a gurgling sound

faint, low, and dismal, came from her lips—but her limbs were convulsing and battling desperately. It was a last effort—like the last flutter of a dying bird; and she sank to rise no more alive. Ere she went down, however, this third time, the murderer caught a glimpse of her countenance,—the expression of which was far more hideous with the agonies of death upon it, than it had seemed before.

Again did he recollect his mother's words: he had seen her go down *a third time*;—and giving vent to cries and yells, which indeed seemed full of frenzied horror, he rushed in the direction of the castle. But not many yards had he thus sped, when he beheld a horseman galloping like the wind towards him; and in a few moments Squire Hawkshaw was upon the spot.

"Good heavens! what is the matter?" he exclaimed, perceiving Edmund alone, without his hat, and dripping with water.

"My wife! my wife! my beloved Adelaide! There! there!"—and with gestures apparently frantic he pointed to the river.

Then flinging himself upon the bank, he moaned and howled horribly: but it was not altogether *acting*—for his feelings were indeed worked up to a fearful pitch; and the remorse as well as the terror he experienced, were immense.

Hawkshaw sprang from his steed, and hurried rapidly to and fro on the bank, ready to plunge in at the slightest indication which the waters might afford in any particular spot, of the victim being immersed beneath. But the surface had become completely calm once more; and perceiving that all must be over, the Squire hastened to lift Saxondale up and say whatsoever he could to fortify and console him. Not for an instant did Hawkshaw suspect the terrific crime which had just been perpetrated there. How could he? Edmund's last wild cries were those which had reached his ears as he was riding at a distance; and he had only come within view of the scene in time to behold the young nobleman flying as if in frenzy along the bank, and giving vent to lamentations the genuineness of which it was impossible to doubt. Then, too, that accident which befell Lord Saxondale, and which had for a moment threatened his own life, told immensely in his favour: for was it not evident to the

mind of the Squire that the distracted husband had boldly plunged in to rescue his wife?

"My lord, my lord," he said, much moved on the young nobleman's behalf, "for heaven's sake, compose yourself! I know the calamity is a dreadful one; but it must be endured with fortitude!"

"Oh! but it is shocking—it is terrible!" cried Edmund: and his accents, his looks, and his whole manner, indicated the wildness and the horror of the most genuine affliction.

"It is shocking!" said the Squire, who indeed felt what he thus expressed. "Come, my lord—I will see you to the castle; and we must procure assistance to recover the—"

He stopped short: he would not say "corpse," for fear of exciting fresh paroxysms of bitter woe on the part of him whom he took to be a miserably bereaved husband. And now the Squire, naturally generous hearted, beheld not in young Saxondale a being who merited his contempt—beheld not in him a member of the family which he had so much reason to detest—beheld not in him the husband of a woman who was all but a branded murderess,—but only a fellow-creature whom a dire misfortune had suddenly overtaken. Nor in the hurry and whirl of his own feelings, had Hawkshaw leisure to reflect (believing the tragedy to be entirely the result of an accident in one sense) that it might be a providential retribution for the crime which Adelaide was but too deeply suspected of having perpetrated in respect to her first husband.

"Come, my lord—let me help you to reach the castle," he said: and sustaining the young nobleman with one arm, he held his horse's bridle in the other,—in which manner they proceeded in the direction of the castellated mansion.

"Oh, Adelaide! Adelaide!" murmured Edmund, thus forcing himself to continue his lamentations: "who could have foreseen this?"

"How did it happen?" asked the Squire, gently and hesitatingly, and displaying all that delicacy with which one fears to probe a deep wound just inflicted.

"Her foot slipped—she was walking a few paces in front of me—and in a moment the water hid her from my view. I plunged in—alas, it was vain!—I would not swim—my own

he was nearly lost——Would to heaven
had died with her!"

"My lord," answered Hawkshaw
calmly, "there are calamities which
are sent to try us in this world, and
rich though deep and terrible, must
nevertheless be borne."

Edmund stopped short——covered his
face with his hands——and appeared to
be violently so that the Squire had the
most difficulty in persuading him to
resume his way to the castle:—or at
least it seemed as if there were all this
difficulty; and so far as Hawkshaw was
concerned, it was precisely the same
thing. At length——after several halts,
and fresh outbursts of grief, more than
half simulated, but still partially arising
from remorse——the castellated mansion
was reached; when horror and dismay
were quickly diffused throughout the
household on hearing what had happened.
Hawkshaw told the tale; and thus here
again, as with himself in the first instance,
without the slightest suspicion of foul play
was entertained. Edmund was hurried
to his own chamber, disapparelled by
his valets, and put to bed: while Hawk-
shaw, accompanied by several of the
servants, provided with materials for
dragging the river, returned to the spot
where the tragedy had taken place. A
boat, mounted on a fleet horse, sped to
Winbrough to procure medical assis-
tance for Lord Saxondale, whom Hawk-
shaw reported to have been himself half
drowned, and whose condition seemed
desperate indeed.

In about a couple of hours, a physi-
cian was in attendance. He adminis-
tered what he considered necessary;
and reported to the domestics that
though their master's system had sus-
tained a terrific shock, there was no
danger of fatal results. After remain-
ing sometime with Edmund, he took
his leave,——intimating that it would
be necessary for him to call again
on the morrow. In the course of
the afternoon the corpse of the drown-
ed lady was fished up from the depths
of the Trent, and was conveyed to the
castle. Hawkshaw undertook to break
to Edmund the intelligence that the
body had been recovered, and that it
was then lying beneath that roof. As
a matter of course, there was a fresh
outburst of apparent grief and anguish on
the part of the young nobleman; and
Hawkshaw again said and did all he
could to strengthen and console him.
When Edmund thought fit to suffer

himself to be somewhat tranquillized, the
Squire delicately hinted that it would be
as well if his mother were communicated
with by that day's post; and the stew-
ard was instructed to write at once to
her ladyship at Saxondale House in
London,——Edmund stating that although
it was his mother's original intention to
proceed to the Continent forthwith, in
order to pass the remainder of the
winter in Italy, he had no doubt she
purposed to tarry a day in the metro-
polis, and would thus receive the letter.
It was accordingly despatched; and Mr.
Hawkshaw, after generously remaining
with Edmund until a late hour in the
evening, took his departure for his own
abode.

Night came——the first night which this
youthful murderer had to pass alone after
the perpetration of his stupendous crime.
It was a night which he indeed dreaded
——a night which he foresaw would be
fraught with ineffable horrors for him-
self. At first he thought of accepting
the proposal which his valet made to sit
up with him: but then he feared lest in
his sleep——if he could sleep——he might
give utterance to words that would
betray the enormity of his guilt; and the
scaffold had never ceased to loom dark
and ominous, before his eyes from the
moment that the voice of conscience
rang the word "*Murderer*" in his ears.
So the valet's presence was dispensed
with; and at eleven o'clock on this
night——the first succeeding his crime
——Edmund was alone. Alone in that
chamber which he had occupied in com-
pany with his wife——the wife who was
no more——the wife whom he himself had
done to death! Ah, it was a loneliness in
one sense——an awful loneliness: but in
another it was no loneliness at all. He
had the companionship of his thoughts
——a horrible companionship! His mind
had the companionship of the dread
images which peopled it——a frightful
companionship! And the room too was
peopled with grisly ghastly shapes——
again a dread companionship!

The wax lights burnt upon the toilet-
table——Oh, not for worlds could the
wretched, guilty young man suffer
himself now to be in the dark! A fire
was blazing in the grate; and the play
of its lurid flames on the opposite wall,
seemed like spectral shapes gliding past.
Edmund tried to sleep: but he dared
not keep his eyes closed. Every half-
minute did he open them and wildly

stare around, in the dread expectation of beholding something horrible standing by his bedside. His nervous startings made the bed-curtains shake; and his blood ran cold with apprehension that a spectre was standing behind those heavy draperies. Often and often, as he thus opened his eyes, did he fancy that he caught a glimpse of some disappearing shape, in any corner of the room to which his looks were at the moment turned. No—he dared not keep his eyes closed! And yet to remain awake the whole night—to lie tossing, and heaving, and convulsing, on his pillow—at one instant with the blood stagnating and congealing into ice in his veins, at another instant tortured with a thrill of fiery agony as if those veins ran with a lightning-fluid—Oh, this was horrible, horrible! Ah, wherefore had he listened to his mother's counsel? wherefore had he done this deed? Vainly did he seek to satisfy his own conscience: vainly did he endeavour to muster, combine, and aggregate every possible argument in order to appease that conscience. He could not! Was he not a murderer? No sophistry could repel this tremendous conviction. And then, what too if Adelaide had been innocent after all? What if the tale in respect to St. Gerard had been a hideous calumny? What if Edmund had really been beloved by her, and she would sooner have perished than harbour a hostile thought in respect to him? Oh, if it were all so,—then of a still deeper shade was the intensity of his guilt!—of a more hideous blackness was the enormity of his crime!

Yet no: she must have been guilty of everything imputed to her—murderous deeds as well as murderous intents! guilty of wanton profligacy—guilty of everything that could render her character abominable, hateful, detestable! Well, but still was he justified in taking her life? No, no—ten thousand times no!

Thus was he racked by varied and conflicting thoughts,—sometimes imagining that Adelaide had been innocent—at others feeling convinced that she was really guilty; but yet with the latter hypothesis being no more able to justify his own deep criminality unto himself, than he could with the former belief. For as in the case of that former belief, such attempt at self-justification was impossible,—equally impracticable did it seem! in

the other. Whichever way he turned—to whatsoever point of view his mental vision was directed—there was only the one stupendous, harrowing, agonizing conviction—he was a murderer!

Hours passed: the wretched young man could not get to sleep. But as the night advanced, he occasionally began to doze off—and would thus be sinking into semi-slumber for a few minutes at a time, when he would start up into complete wakefulness—wild and horrible—with the idea that the cold hand of a corpse was laid upon his cheek: or that the countenance of his murdered wife, ghastly and distorted as he had seen it on the surface of the water, was looking in upon him through the curtains. Or else it would appear to him that those wild cries of distress which had thrilled agonizingly over the Trent, were still ringing in his ear; and so he started up, he found himself bathed in his own agony—covered with the cold perspiration that burst forth in large drops all over!

But at length he did sleep a while without such startling interruption: yet it was to dream as horribly. Yes—it was to dream that he stood in a court of justice which was crowded from floor to roof: he beheld the jury, stern and resolute in the performance of their duty—the judge, grave and inflexible—an advocate pleading against him, telling the whole tale as the incident had really happened—and the crowd gazing on him with looks of horror and aversion. He saw the black cap produced—he heard the sentence of death pronounced. He fancied that he threw himself on his feet to implore mercy with a wild cry;—and this wild cry was real enough—for therewith he awoke.

He went to sleep again—and also to dream again. This time it was to behold a scaffold erected—a living ocean of people gathered around the dark and sinister object—the halter pendant to the cross-beam—the hangman ready to do his dreadful work. He fancied himself pinioned, walking by the side of the chaplain—ascending the steps leading to the platform of death. He mounted—he stood upon the drop—the noose was placed round his neck—the white night-cap was drawn over his countenance—the knell was tolling deep and ominous upon

his ear. Then from his lips rang forth a pealing cry of agony: he started into fullest wakefulness—the cry which *again in reality* he had sent forth, was still ringing through the room; but the horrible phantasmagoria of the scaffold and the crowd had passed away. It was morning: the light was glimmering in at the casement—Thank heaven, it was morning!

Thus passed Edmund's first night after he had become a murderer—Oh, how was he to endure the approach of a second? how to look forward through the vista of coming years, and to know that they must have as many nights as days?

CHAPTER CLIX

THE INQUEST

THE haggard ghastliness which a night full of horrors had left upon Lord Saxondale's countenance, was even more than sufficient to impress the domestics generally with the notion that he profoundly felt his bereavement; and thus was it quite unnecessary for him to simulate any show of grief. Squire Hawkshaw,—with the most generous consideration for the young nobleman whom, before his supposed calamity, he had well nigh "cut,"—called soon after the breakfast hour at Saxondale Castle, and felt really shocked on beholding the aspect which Edmund's countenance presented. As far as ever from entertaining the slightest suspicion that there was guilt at the bottom, the kind-hearted Squire shared in the opinion of the domestics, that the young nobleman was profoundly afflicted, and that he felt his loss with a greater keenness than might have been conceived on the part of one by no means conspicuous for amiable or generous sensibilities.

This was a day of considerable bustle, even in a house of death. Tailors and milliners arrived from Gainsborough to receive orders for the mourning-apparel of the household generally: the undertaker likewise made his appearance; and in the afternoon an inquest was to be holden. The hours passed; and Mr. Hawkshaw remained with Edmund, not merely from friendly motives, but likewise because he was to be a principal witness at the inquest. During these hours Edmund paced to and fro in the

drawing room—or else threw himself for a few minutes at a time upon a sofa,—all his conduct and proceedings, however, being full well calculated to sustain the impression of his immense woe. Nor were his excitement and agitation altogether feigned: they arose from the horrors of the preceding night, as the ocean retains the trouble of its waves for some time after the storm has swept by. They arose too from remorse, as well as from apprehension of the coming night;—they arose also from a vague dread of the inquest; for though he saw not how the real truth could be suspected, yet conscience made him a coward;—and they arose likewise from the idea of having to meet his mother; because that she would very probably, for appearance' sake, hasten back into Lincolnshire on receiving the letter, he now began to surmise.

At about three o'clock in the afternoon, the coroner arrived at Saxondale Castle; and was speedily followed by the persons who had been summoned to serve as the jury, and who consisted chiefly of gentlemen or tenant-farmers dwelling in the neighbourhood. It was in the dining-room that the conclave assembled; and after the usual preliminaries, the coroner and the jury proceeded to view the body. This was merely a formal matter,—those persons contenting themselves with looking into the room where the corpse lay, and then retiring. All this while Edmund remained with Mr. Hawkshaw in the drawing-room. He had not as yet seen the body since it was taken forth from the water; and when once, for the sake of appearances, in the earlier part of the day, he had cried out, in a suddenly feigned paroxysm of despair, "that he would speed to embrace the remains of his beloved Adelaide," the well-meaning Squire had held him back.

The proceedings of the inquest occupied no great length of time. The physician who attended upon Edmund proved that death in respect to Adelaide had arisen from drowning; and when asked, as a mere matter of form, whether there were indications of violence having been used, he emphatically, and indeed most truthfully, responded in the negative. Edmund was compelled to attend, and give an explanation of how the tragedy had occurred. The mortal terror which seized upon him when he found himself in the presence of the coroner and

the jury, took the semblance of an overpowering grief; and thus was all suspicion of foul play still effectually warded off. The account that he rendered was the same as that which he had given to Mr. Hawkshaw,—though a little more detailed: but he was soon suffered to quit the room, the coroner feeling deeply for him. Mr. Hawkshaw, when examined as a witness, gave his evidence according to his knowledge of the circumstances; and after a brief charge from the coroner, the jury delivered a verdict of “Accidental Death.”

While Hawkshaw remained below, Edmund paced the drawing-room in considerable agitation. He was there alone: he could give unrestrained vent to his tortured feelings. Myriads of apprehensions crowded in upon his mind. What if, after all, there had been some witness of the deed—a witness unseen by him? What if such witness should suddenly come forward? Edmund had read of such things in books recording the annals of crime: he knew that by inscrutable means did Providence often bring home guilt to its perpetrator. Yet in spite of these terrors which were haunting him, Edmund’s mind had a horrible clearness—an illimitable sense of the necessity of keeping the strictest guard over his looks, his words, and his actions. Thus, as he heard footsteps approaching the room-door, and knew them to be Hawkshaw’s, he said to himself, “If I show anxiety to learn the result of the inquest I am lost?”

Accordingly, as the Squire entered the apartment, Edmund appeared to be again absorbed in the deepest woe, as if unmindful even that an inquest was being held at all. Yet from Hawkshaw’s lips were about to come forth the words that must either confirm all his horrible terrors, or afford a sudden relief to his mind. The words were spoken; the verdict was made known—and Edmund remained with his countenance buried in his kerchief, for fear lest any change of the expression of his features should raise a suspicion where evidently none existed as yet.

The coroner and the jury, having partaken of refreshments which were served up to them, departed to their respective homes; and Mr. Hawkshaw remained with Edmund. He stayed to dinner, being unwilling to leave the unfortunate young nobleman (as he considered him to be) until the last

moment; but conceiving it probable that Lady Saxondale might make her appearance that evening—and being naturally disinclined to meet her—he departed at about nine o’clock. Again was Edmund alone, but the least thing in a better frame of mind than he was a few hours back. The grand ordeal had been passed through—the inquest was over—and it had terminated in a way which had relieved his mind from torturing apprehensions. But he had yet two terrors to look in the face. His mother was coming: and the night was coming! At least, the longer he reflected upon the course which Lady Saxondale was likely to pursue, the more convinced was he that she *would* come. And why did he dread to meet her? Because he shrank from the thought of looking in the face any one who could say to him, “Thou art a murderer!”

But his mother—was not she also stained with crime? and did he not know it? Ah, yes! but the knowledge thereof mitigated little, if at all, the dread feeling which he himself must experience, of having put in the power of any living soul to say, “Thou art a murderer!”

An hour passed: it was ten o’clock. Lady Saxondale must have received the letter at about nine in the morning; if she set off immediately, she might be at the castle now. Ah! no sooner had the young nobleman made this reflection, when the sounds of an equipage dashing up to the gateway, reached his ears. No doubt it was his mother! In a few minutes he would know; and during those few minutes he experienced the acutest suspense: for, as above stated, it was with him a horrible dread to look in the face of any one who even by a glance seemed to say, “Thou art a murderer!”

Footsteps were ascending the stairs: the door opened—and Lady Saxondale made her appearance. For the sake of show in the presence of the domestic who had attended her thither she threw her arms about Edmund’s neck, and from her lips sent forth sounds which passed well enough for sobs. The door closed—the domestic had retired—there was no longer need for hypocrisy; and therefore, abruptly withdrawing herself from Edmund, she flung her gaze upon him. Their eyes met: and the conscience-stricken young man thought that as plain as

eyes could speak, those of his mother said to him, "Thou art a murderer!"

He staggered back, and sank on a chair as if annihilated. His feelings were at that moment horrible. Crime had looked crime in the face: and crime had seemed to take crime its own self-reproach. Lady Saxondale, comprehending tolerably well what passing in Edmund's soul, smiled scornfully for an instant,—as if to be thus overcome by the sense of crime, was a weakness deserving contempt. But as that expression quickly vanished from her features, she recollected the necessity of fortifying Edmund's mind as much as possible, so that he should not be led into a betrayal of his guilt. She forced herself to speak kindly to him; and this perhaps she was the better enabled to do, inasmuch as since he had become criminal, she could hate him a trifle less than she had done before. For if virtue as its affections, so has crime: affinities of positions sometimes engender affinities of feelings. Besides, Lady Saxondale had resolved on pursuing a different course from that which she had heretofore adopted towards Edmund. Sternly resolved to wield the iron sceptre of domestic domination, she nevertheless purposed to treat him with a sufficient amount of kindness and indulgence, after a certain fashion, as would make him insensible of the tyranny of her rule. He was to be her slave without precisely knowing it. Through him would she continue the head of the house of Saxondale, even after his majority should be attained. Formally he would be the owner of the wide domains and the lordly revenues: but she would virtually exercise supreme control over both. Such was the policy he intended to adopt; such were the prospects which were spread out before her.

Edmund was in that frame of mind when the soothing words of kindness could not be lost upon him, ill conditioned mortal though he were. Besides, it was a relief for him to reflect that his mother, after all, did not mean to make a reproach of the black guilt which he had perpetrated, and into which she had persuaded him. He accordingly looked up; and he acquired courage from her own firm and resolute demeanour. In less than half-an hour from the moment of her arrival, she got him to talk upon the incidents of the tragedy. He described the details—

stated how generously Hawkshaw had behaved to him—how accident had positively and literally helped him in his tale by sending the Squire at the moment to the scene of the crime—and how the inquest had passed off favourably. This intelligence, which her ladyship had not previously heard, was most welcome to her; and she was also rejoiced that circumstances should thus have partially smitten down the barriers which had lately existed between Hawkshaw and the Saxondale family. Not that it was to be supposed the Squire would repeat his visits, now that she was once more at the castle; but, at all events, in him she felt assured, from what she now heard, that they possessed a vindicator, should suspicion venture to breathe the surmise that perhaps, after all, Edmund's wife had not come fairly by her death.

The hour for retiring arrived; and Lady Saxondale saw by the ghastly look which Edmund's countenance now wore, that he was afraid of the horrors of the coming night. She said all she could to strengthen his mind: she bade him remember that no human tongue save his and hers could proclaim the secret; and that if he had nothing to fear at the hands of living beings, it was pure idiotic imbecility to give way to superstitious apprehensions. Edmund was encouraged: but when he again found himself alone in his chamber—when his valet was dismissed—and he, disapparelled, was about to enter his couch—he was seized with such a sudden consternation that he could not have been more terrified if a veritable spectre had sprung up before him. Even as he hastened to leap into his bed, he dreaded lest his foot should be caught by the cold hand of death protruded from beneath it. And now did he indeed enter on another frightful ordeal—an ordeal of hours of mental anguish and hideous imaginings—frightful waking fancies alternating with the dreams of fitful and broken slumbers, wherein the wild cries of dying agony thrilling over the Trent, the ghastly countenance which had been upturned from the cold waters towards him, and all the circumstances of the horrible tragedy were painfully, poignantly, vividly revived. And there was that young nobleman bearing a proud title—possessed of wealth—couched upon down—environed by velvet and satin draperies—in a

magnificently furnished room,—there he was, in a state of mind to be envied only by any wretch whose guilt *was* discovered and who was about to expiate it on the scaffold. But if this were not the reality of Edmund's position, he at least experienced all its horrors in his dreams: for again did he behold the tribunal of justice engaged in a trial for murder, where he figured as the principal—again did he behold the dark and ominous scaffold, with all the appalling *paraphernalia* of death, and himself the criminal about to die!

When the cold wintry morning sent its dull glimmering light in at the casements, it found the young man more ghastly, more haggard than before; and as he looked at himself in the mirror, he recoiled with dismay and affright, so changed had he become. When his valet entered to assist in the morning-toilet, the man could not prevent himself from showing how much he was shocked at his master's appearance: but still he suspected not that it was guilty horror, instead of the immensity of woe, which had thus stamped its terrific traces on Edmund's countenance. On descending to the breakfast parlour, he found his mother already there; and the instant they were alone, Lady Saxondale said, "You have passed a bad night, Edmund."

"Mother," he answered, "a few more such nights as these will either send me to a mad-house, or else hurry me to the grave. Ah! I can understand how it is that people's hair have turned white in a single night—a statement at which I have often been wont to laugh!"

"Edmund, I will not reproach you," answered Lady Saxondale: "I will not tell you that this is an unmanly cowardice: but I will conjure you to exercise greater control over your feelings. You must do it! At present, those about us give you credit for a natural grief: but grief, the sincerest and the severest, becomes toned down; and if you assume not such a demeanour, suspicions will arise. Bear this in your mind—and let it serve to arm you with courage."

"It must, it must!" murmured Edmund. "Yes—I see that you are right."

Several days passed; and it appeared as if the counsel given by Lady Saxondale, was not entirely thrown away upon Edmund. But then he had discovered the means of defying the horrors of the night—or rather of

rendering himself unconscious of them. He drank deeply. Lady Saxondale saw it—permitted it—even encouraged it; and when, more than half intoxicated, he went to his bed at night, she attended him to the door of his chamber,—whispering to the valet, "that grief had made sad havoc with his unfortunate master."

We should observe that before the lid of the coffin containing Adelaide's remains, was screwed down. Lady Saxondale and Edmund proceeded together to the chamber where the corpse lay, ostensibly for the purpose of bestowing a last look on those remains. But this was a piece of mockery in perfect keeping with all the other horrible proceedings that were known only unto their own hearts. When alone together in that room, they did not so much as approach the coffin; Edmund could not even bring himself to throw a single glance at it: but when they came forth again, it was with their kerchiefs to their eyes, as if they were both deeply moved.

The funeral took place with considerable pomp, all the domestics following as mourners, and Edmund at their head. The ceremony was over; and Lady Saxondale thought that now the tomb had closed above the *one* object who was so great a barrier to her complete domination, she had effectually ensured her triumph. But yet she felt and she knew that her power was not consolidated. Madge Somers had not yet been disposed of: Lord Harold Staunton had hitherto found no opportunity of carrying out her instructions. This circumstance caused her much uneasiness: for that woman was possessed of a secret which, if once told, would bring utter ruin down upon the head of this patrician lady who had already consummated so many crimes in order to attain her ends. She must go to London to see Lord Harold again—to devise with him some plan to be immediately executed, if that which he had already suggested should prove impossible. She was uneasy, as we have said—but only uneasy: she was not dispirited—much less did she despair. The blow so recently struck, had inspired her with renewed confidence in herself and her resources. By that blow she had gained two grand ends at once; she had removed Adelaide from her path, and she had got Edmund completely into her power. One more achievement to get Madge

Somers out of the way, and she would be entirely safe!

The day after the funeral she and Edmund set out for London. The young nobleman was far from sorry to leave a spot which was associated with the black crime that he had been induced to commit; and during the journey he recovered as much of his wonted cheerfulness as he dared put on under existing circumstances. His mother continued to preserve her kindness of manner towards him,—yet at the same time acting as the supreme authority in all things, and with just a sufficient display of her will as to prove that she meant to be dominant. Edmund rebelled not. It was not that he exactly said to himself he was in his mother's power: because, after all, crime could not betray crime without drawing down destruction on its own head as well as on that of the one denounced. But the real weakness of Edmund's nature now showed itself in yielding voluntarily to a state of more or less dependence. The fact was, Lady Saxondale, with a consummate art, was making herself necessary to him,—anticipating his wants and wishes, studying his comforts, and in a thousand ways suffering him to perceive that her's was after all a master spirit to which he had better trust as the means of helping him on through that career which so to speak, had begun anew from the starting-post of a crime.

They arrived in London,—arrived there, dressed in deep mourning; but beyond the Petersfields, Marlow and Malton, and a few—a *very* few other individuals, whom selfish motives rendered the hangers-on of wealthy personages,—they had no friends to come and console with them on the loss sustained,—assuming such condolence to be acceptable under the circumstances. But for all this Lady Saxondale cared little; and she did her best to prevent Edmund from feeling annoyed at their comparatively isolated position. Indeed, his experience had recently been of this sort; and as his chief sources of enjoyment were now centered in the champagne-bottle and the pleasures of the dinner-table, he was not very difficult to be made contented.

Immediately on their arrival in London, Lady Saxondale sent an intimation of the circumstance to the obscure lodging which, under a feigned name, Lord Harold Staunton was

occupying the vicinage of the Regent's Park; and he delayed not to hasten to the mansion in Park Lane. It was in the evening of the day after her ladyship's return to town with Edmund, that Staunton thus called upon her; and they were at once closeted together to deliberate upon their affairs.

"You look charming, dearest Harriet," said the young nobleman, "in this morning garb. It becomes you wonderfully: it sets off your grandly handsome figure to the fullest advantage:"—and he threw his arm round her waist as they sat together upon the sofa. "I love you, Harriet—yes, I love you more than ever! And you?"

"I love you also, Harold," she responded, not merely suffering his caresses, but returning them.

For now that Lady Saxondale had no longer a reputation to lose, she had made up her mind to gratify her passions without restraint. Moreover, she had an interest in keeping the young nobleman enchained to her—for she did not intend to fulfil her previously given promise of marrying him: she would never divide with another that power which she had toiled through crimes and waded through iniquities to consolidate: but she would retain him as her paramour, and she knew that by lavishing gold she could not fail to preserve her influence over him.

"And this mourning too," continued Lord Harold, looking significantly in that face upon which he had just been imprinting kisses,—you are not sorry to wear it under such circumstances?"

"The worst and bitterest enemy I ever encountered," responded Lady Saxondale,—“far worse and far more bitter than even your uncle has proved himself—is now no longer an obstacle in my path. She is gone—and Edmund is completely in my power. He who for a time succeeded in emancipating himself from my shackles, has got them now more closely riven upon his limbs than he had when as a child he dared not attempt to thwart me.”

"I understand," observed Harold. "I read in the newspapers the account of how Edmund's wife met her death; and it struck me at the time——"

"Enough! breathe not your thoughts aloud, Harold!" interrupted her ladyship, "Yes—it is so: you have rightly conjectured: there need be no secrets between you and me. Is not Edmund—with his weak and frivolous mind—with

his superstitious terror, and his addiction to the grossest sensualities—is he not completely in my power? But Ah! you know not what else occurred at Saxondale Castle. I dared not write to you upon the subject; and no sooner had I arrived in London the other day, when the letter announcing Adelaide's death summoned me back again; and therefore I had no time to communicate with you."

"But what happened?" inquired Harold, to a certain degree excited by feverish suspense.

"That dress——"

"Ah!" he ejaculated with a quick start; and his countenance became ashy pale.

"Do not be alarmed," his patrician paramour hastened to observe. "Fortunately nothing came of the incident: but at one moment it appeared so frightfully threatening, that I was almost dispossessed of every particle of courage. For, you perceive, as Adelaide knew everything—as Edmund in his weakness and his folly had made her a confidante of all past circumstances—the discovery of that masquerade-dress set her reflecting upon other things; and so astute, so cunning was she——"

"I comprehend," said Lord Harold, with a shudder. "She penetrated the mystery of that deed——"

"Yes—she fathomed it; and I fell all of a sudden completely into her power. Ah! there was a moment," continued Lady Saxondale, "when I abandoned myself to despair,—until gradually in my imagination expanded the idea that she must be removed. But I ought to observe that the dress fell into the hands of the constable of Gainsborough——"

"The constable?" echoed Harold, with another quick start, and flinging his affrighted glances around, as if he apprehended lest the door should burst open and the officers of justice rush in to seize upon him.

"Harold, this is foolish on your part," said Lady Saxondale. "I tell you the danger is past:"—and then she explained the particulars of her interview with the head-constable of Gainsborough.

This led her on to describe the adventures of Chiffin in the chapel—how he was discovered and made prisoner—and how she had effected his release.

"You have passed through a trying ordeal, Harriet," observed Staunton, pressing her towards him.

"Yes: but my power is once again consolidated," she answered with

a look of triumph. "There is nothing now to be a source of terror, save and except the one secret which that woman may reveal."

"And this secret," said Lord Harold,—"how is it of such paramount importance? You have never yet informed me: but you have just given me the assurance that henceforth there shall be no concealment of any kind between us."

"Ah, I had forgotten!" responded her ladyship. "This one secret must remain my own—at least for the present. Do not press me, Harold, upon that point."

"I will not—I will not," he answered, so completely ensnared by her beauty as he strained her in his arms, that he was entirely submissive to her will.

"And now, relative to this woman," she continued. "What is the latest intelligence you have obtained concerning her?"

"That she still lies completely prostrate—unable to speak—unable even to move her limbs: but the medical attendant confidently predicts her recovery."

"Then, Harold," immediately added Lady Saxondale, "she must be dealt with speedily. While in this state, the opportunity is most favourable for her removal in pursuance of the plan which I myself suggested to you some time since."

"You know, Harriet, the difficulties with which I have had to contend. Ah! if we had only that man Chiffin to aid us——"

"If we had," replied Lady Saxondale, in a musing manner, "it would be settled in one way or another off-hand. Idiot that I was when aiding him to effect his escape, that I did not bid him come up to London and succour you in the business! However, you must carry out the operations immediately. You know not—indeed you know not—how much depends upon it? Even a risk must be run! Surely, surely you can by some means get William Deveril out of the way for a few hours? A forged letter will do this. Ah, the idea is a good one! Know you if your uncle the Marquis is still at Edenbridge?"

"Yes—I have every reason to believe so," replied Harold.

"And can you not intimate his lordship's hand?" asked Lady Saxondale. "Can you not write a pressing-letter?"

as if coming from your uncle, and urging Mr. Deveril to go to him at once? Then, your assistants being in readiness to act——"

"I understand: it shall be done!" ejaculated Staunton. "Yes—it shall be done without delay."

After a little more conversation, Lady Saxondale and her paramour separated, the latter issuing forth from the mansion.

He was proceeding along Park Lane in order to reach Oxford Street, whence he purposed to take a cab home,—when by the light of a lamp he perceived the form of a man walking rapidly a little way ahead, and keeping as much in the shade as possible,—in short evidently striving to escape the notice of passers-by.

"Ah!" ejaculated Lord Harold himself: "the very man who is so needful to me now!"—and quickening his pace, he found that his suspicion was correct, and that the individual thus proceeding stealthily along, was none other than Chiffin the Cannibal.

"My good fellow," said the young nobleman, "it is fortunate I have thus fallen in with you,

"Ah! is it you, my lord?" observed Chiffin, who was at first somewhat alarmed by hearing such quick footsteps, as if they were in pursuit. "And pray what is there in hand? Some little business to be done? No good though, I'll be bound: or else you wouldn't want my assistance."

"There is money to be earned," answered Harold, "and what is more—there is a deed for you to finish, which you once commenced but clumsily left undone."

"And what may that be?" inquired the Cannibal.

"If I mention the name of Madge Somers, you will understand me?"

"Nothing can be plainer, my Lord; and when money is to be got and an old spite to be gratified, I'm your man."

"We cannot remain talking here," observed Harold. "Where can we go?"

"Come to my lodging my lord," responded Chiffin. "It's all safe there: the people are right enough—and there's no danger. Follow me at a distance—and don't lose sight of me."

"Lead on," said Harold: "I shall not miss you."

The Cannibal accordingly proceeded along Park Lane in the direction of Oxford Street. This he rapidly crossed,

and soon plunged into Duke Street, —turning thence into a narrow dark alley, where he stopped at the door of a house which, so far as could be judged amidst the obscurity, was of poverty-stricken appearance, Lord Harold speedily, joined him; and the Cannibal, letting himself in with a latch-key, conducted the young nobleman up a couple of flights of stairs, into a small back room, where he speedily struck a light. The den was poorly furnished—with a bed, a table, two or three chairs, and some other necessities, but it seemed a sufficiently secure hiding place for a person who was so much "wanted" as Mr. Chiffin,

"Sit down, my lord—and make yourself at home," said the Cannibal. "Here's brandy and water. If you've got a cigar you can light it: I don't mind smoke—or more does my landlady, as long as she gets the ready. You see I'm going to blow a cloud"—and he lighted his pipe accordingly.

"You have had some strange adventures lately," observed Harold, looking rather suspiciously around the room, and not feeling over comfortable in the Cannibal's quarters, despite the kind invitation to make himself at home.

"Adventures—ah!" growled Chiffin "rum'uns enough too. But as you was in Park Lane, I suppose you have been to see my very particlar and intimate friend her ladyship; and so she has no doubt told you all about it. But adventures are always tumbling down upon me; and a precious one I had this morning too, I can tell you. You see, my lord, I thought this toggery of mine had better be changed: but as I didn't like to walk right bang into a Regent Street tailor's and order a fashionable suit, it struck me as how I would go down to the quarters where those honest folks of Jews deal in second-hand articles. They are not such impudent fellers as to ask any questions if so be they only get their price. So having made up my mind to rig myself out afresh, and convert myself into a real genelman—all the better to get out of the country, which I mean to do as soon as possible—I toddled off towards Houndsditch. I needn't tell your lordship that I don't patronise the great thoroughfares, but keep as much as possible in the back lanes and alleys. That's the way I take my walks. Well, at length I found myself in Houndsditch: and just past Phil's Buildings stands the new Exchange——"

"The Exchange?" ejaculated Lord Harold. "I always thought it was on Cornhill, close by the Bank of England."

"Lord bless your lordship's ignorance!" exclaimed Chiffin. "I didn't mean the Exchange where such tip-top fellers as Rothschild and them sort of coves go. I mean the Jews' Exchange in Houndsditch. It was only built a year or two ago, by a Mr. Isaac; and so you may take your salvation oath he was a Jew by the name. Well, there's a toll at the entrance; and I had to fork out a halfpenny for going in as a buyer. And when I did get in—for I had never been there before in my life—I was astonished!"

"The magnificence of the place, I suppose?" observed Harold.

"Magnificence of fiddlesticks," exclaimed Chiffin. "No—not that. I mean I was astonished at the rum figures I saw, and the lots of toggery spread out on every side. I really fancied the whole twelve tribes of Israel!—there was twelve, wasn't there?—Ah, I thought so. Well, the whole of the twelve tribes seemed to be there. Men, and women, and children—all Jews, and no mistake—save and except a few Christians like me, that came as buyers. Your lordship smiles: but I suppose you call yourself a Christain—and why shouldn't I? Howsumever, there I was in the middle of that Exchange, surrounded by such quantities of clothes of all shapes, sizes, and colours, that there was enough to suit and fit a whole tribe of naked Indians, if any of them Missionary Societies should be at a loss for toggery to send out to clothe them with. And such a clatter of voices too—it was as stunning as Babel! Presently I saw one venerable old Jew in a gaberdine—with a long beard—a pair of top-boots in one hand—and his bag over his shoulder; and he looked uncommon suspicious at me, as if he thought I meant to take an advantage of him. The idea of an innocent say-nothing-to-nobody sort of a genelman like me, fancying he could take in a Jew! But I presently recollected that I had seen this identical old feller at the *Billy Goat*—that's a public-house in Agar Town; and I got rather funky. For thinks I to myself, the old feller might go and peach for the sake of the reward. So, as he was looking at me askance from under his battered old hat, I turned towards a stall: and snatching up a pair of unmentionables,

asked the price. A shambling lanky feller of a Jew, with a long frock-coat on that was never made for him,—and he too was carrying a pair of boots in his hand,—asks me thirty shillings, swearing they was dirt cheap and that he would lose by the bargain. I was just telling him, in no very complimentary terms, that I thought it a dead take-in,—when a voice whispered over my shoulder, 'They'll be very cheap, Mr. Chiffin, at a hundred pounds.'—Now, my lord, I'm no coward: I scarce know what cowardice is: but 'pon my soul, any one might have knocked me down with a straw: for without turning my head, I know uncommon well it was that old rascal of a Jew with the long beard and greasy gaberdine. So then he fronts me: and fixing his piercing eyes upon me, says, says he, 'I know Mr. Chiffin is a genelman, which always has plenty of money about him:'—and then he winked in a knowing manner, so that I couldn't be off guessing what he meant. The fact is, my lord, I did a certain little business at the public house where I had seen the old Jew——"

"Yes, yes—I know it," interrupted Lord Harold, somewhat impatiently; for he liked as little as might be to have to listen to the Cannibal's story: but at the same time it did not answer his purpose to offend the man. "So I suppose you had to give a large sum of money?"

"Well, my lord," continued Chiffin, "the short and the long of it was that this old Jew whispered to the long lanky feller which was showing me the unmentionables; and they asked me to step along with them to the nearest public house, where we might talk certain little matters over. I did not dare refuse: they might have raised a hue and cry, and I should have been done for. So we went away together. The old Jew asked for a private room: and when we were all three closeted there, he told me as cool as possible that if I didn't give him every farthing I had about me, he would shout out for the constables. There was a pretty plight for a genelman like me to be in!—and as am atter of course I was as powerless as a child in their hands. I could not even prevent them from searching me as they chose: 'cos why, though I was strong enough to knock 'em both into the middle of next week, or smash 'em up into little bits, yet I didn't dare raise a finger or even look savage, for fear lest they should give the alarm.

Well, my lord, as I am telling you, I was just like a child in their hands; and as I've lately made it a rule to carry about with me all I possess—'cos why, I was some time ago robbed by a pal of mine named Tony Wilkins, when I left my money locked up in a cupboard——”

“Then I suppose these Jews plundered you of every farthing?” observed Lord Harold, with an increasing impatience, which he could no longer conceal.

“All except a little loose silver and a few half-pence,” replied Chiffin, with a horribly savage expression of countenance; “and they would not even give me them inexpressibles that I had been bargaining for. So I made the best of my way off from that public-house, and went down to another that I knewed of in Wapping. There I stayed till about a couple of hours back,—when I thought to myself I would just go and call at Saxondale House, and see whether her ladyship was at home: for if so, I knew she wouldn't leave an old friend in trouble and danger. So I tramped all the way from Wapping to Park Lane: but just as I was going to knock at the door, I twigged a couple of constables standing talking close by a lamp-post; and I therefore thought I had better move on a bit. Then your lordship soon after overtook me; and so, as the tale-writers say, I've brought down my history and adventures to the present moment.”

“It therefore appears,” observed Lord Harold, “that your finances are in no very flourishing condition?”

“As low as they well can be,” answered Chiffin. “A many times I have wanted to get clear out of the country, and take my gentility and good looks to America: but somehow or another, things have always turned up to keep me in England, and prevent me from affording the Yankoes the pleasure of a personal acquaintance with such a celebrated character as I am. This time, however, if I can only get the wherewith—and which your lordship seems to promise—it won't be very long before I take my departure.”

“Then listen,” said Lord Harold Staunton: “and I will explain the object which I have in view. That woman of whom I spoke—Madge Somers—still lies an invalid at Mr. Deveril's house. It suits my purpose—no matter why—that she should be

removed thence——ultimately to be made away with,” added the young nobleman, lowering his voice almost to a whisper.

“Well, my lord, nothing is easier than this,” answered Chiffin. “But why not have her made away with on the spot?”

“No: such a deed as *that* would create too tremendous a sensation,” rejoined Harold: “whereas, if she be simply borne away in the first instance, those from whose care she is taken will remain in the dark as to her fate; and a letter may be written to them a day or two afterwards, to assure them that the woman is comfortable and in good quarters, but that there are circumstances which render it necessary she should thus be retained in a seclusion which it will be useless for them to make any endeavour to penetrate.”

“Have your own way, my lord,” responded Chiffin: “it's your concern—not mine; and if you pay, I am bound to follow your lordship's directions, Where is she to be taken to?”

“To some great distance,” answered Lord Harold,—“and under circumstances the best calculated to break off all clue to the route thus taken. “But,” he added, with an ominous expression of countenance. “she is to be made away with! Need I say more on this point?”

“Not a syllable, my lord,” responded Chiffin, with a grim look of intelligence.

“But there are other members with which you must be made acquainted,” resumed Harold. “I have already engaged some men to act, when opportunity shall serve, in this business——”

“Who are they?” demanded the Cannibal quickly.

“They bear the euphonious names of Mat the Cadger and Spider Bill,” returned Lord Harold.

“I know 'em well,” said Chiffin. “How came your lordship to be acquainted with such pleasant and agreeable individuals?”

“Some months ago I was led by curiosity to some horrible den in the neighbourhood of Drury Lane, kept by a certain Widow Burley and her two daughters——”

“Enough!” interrupted the Cannibal. “I understand. Biddy Burley is the mistress of Mat the Cadger, and Polly Burley of Spider Bill. So I suppose you got at these chaps by mean of them Burleys?”

"Exactly so," answered Lord Harold. "I presume you will not refuse to act with them? They want a man of your energy to lead them in the matter."

"To be sure they do!" ejaculated Chiffin, with a smile of satisfaction, as if he knew full well that his astuteness and courage must invariably place him at the head of any villanous expedition or iniquitous venture with which he might become connected. "All your lordship has got to do is to tell them to come to me. I know they are to be trusted; and we'll lay our heads together."

Some further conversation took place between the young nobleman and Chiffin the Cannibal;—and the former, having given the latter some money for his present purposes, took his departure.

CHAPTER CLXI.

THE VILLA.

WE must now return to the villa near the Regent's Park—that villa which was the home of William and Angela Deveril, and which Madge Somers still lay upon the bed of illness. The reader has already learnt how she experienced a most serious relapse in consequence of her endeavour to commit to a slate those words which she could not speak with the tongue, but to which she was so impatient to give utterance. Some weeks had now elapsed since that period when she did succeed in committing to the slate this brief and unfinished sentence:—*William Deveril is the s—*." During that interval her position had been most dangerous; and were it not for the assiduous ministrations of the beauteous Angela, she must have succumbed. The medical man who was in attendance upon her, frequently declared that to Miss Deveril's kind attentions—even more than to his own skill—was the invalid indebted for the prolongation of her life; and that to the same cause she would chiefly owe her recovery, should it eventually take place.

Within the last few days previous to the date to which our narrative has been brought, the medical attendant had been enabled to predict with confidence that she would recover; but still, as Lord Harold had ascertained, she lay prostrate and powerless—speechless—and so weak as scarcely to

be able to acknowledge by signs the attentions she received from Miss Deveril. This young lady had not absented herself from the villa, save for an hour's daily walk with her brother, ever since that brief visit which they paid together to Edenbridge Park, and when Francis Paton avowed his love. But on several occasions Frank had journeyed up from Kent to see his betrothed; and frequent was the epistolary correspondence between them. William Deveril still continued to call regularly upon his charming and well beloved Florina in Cavendish Square,—and thus stood matters at the time when Lord Harold Staunton encountered Chiffin, as described in the preceding chapter.

It was in the morning of the second day after this encounter, that a letter bearing the Edenbridge post mark, was delivered at the villa. It was addressed to William Deveril; and its contents were found to be as follow:

"Edenbridge Park, December 22nd, 1844.
"My dear Deveril,

"Something has transpired which renders it necessary that I should see you to-morrow evening (the 23rd) at the Park. You had better leave London so as to be with us at the dinner-hour. Of course you will stay the night; but if you be anxious to return home soon, I will let you depart on the following day. Do not alarm yourself unnecessarily as to the nature of the business to which I have so distantly alluded; for though of importance, and requiring prompt attention, it need nevertheless excite no apprehension.

"We all join in kindest regards to your amiable sister and yourself; and believe me to remain,

"Your sincere friend,
"EAGLEDEAN."

This letter was received at the villa while the brother and sister were seated at the breakfast-table. William had at once exclaimed that it was from the Marquis of Eagledean,—not merely because he perceived the Edenbridge post-mark, but likewise because he fancied that it was his lordship's handwriting. But as he read the letter, his countenance gradually expressed a look of suspicion and mistrust,—so that Angela observed him with an increasing degree of anxiety.

"I hope, dear brother, there is nothing wrong?"

"Read for yourself, Angela," he answered, giving her the letter. "And now what do you think?" he inquired when she had perused it.

"There certainly appears something strange in the wording of the contents,

replied Angela, also mystified and suspicious: "and yet it is his lordship's handwriting—here too is the Edenbridge post-mark——"

"But observe, my dear sister," interrupted our young hero. "This letter addresses me as '*My dear Deveril*,'—whereas the Marquis invariably writes to me as '*My dear William*.' It speaks of '*kindest regards*,' whereas the term is wont to be either '*most affectionate regards*' or, '*kindest love*;' and instead of '*your sincere friend*,' his lordship is accustomed to subscribe himself '*Your's affectionately*,' or '*Your affectionate friend*.' Trivial as the variations in this letter may seem from his lordship's habitual manner of communicating with me, they are nevertheless important when a suspicion is excited."

"True!" observed Angela, thoughtfully as well as anxiously. "But what do you suspect?"

"I know not, dear sister: and yet I am afraid that some treachery is at the bottom of this note. Indeed," he continued, having taken up the letter again and considered it attentively, "I am now all but convinced that this is not even the handwriting of the Marquis, excellent though the imitation be. Angela, it is a forgery—I feel convinced of it! and there is a treacherous intent in some quarter!"

The young maiden grew very much alarmed: but her brother hastened to reassure her, by observing, "It would be much worse, Angela, if our suspicions had not been thus excited, and if in blind confidence I were to plunge headlong into the snare, whatsoever it may be, that is set for me. The object evidently is to get me away from home during the ensuing night: hence the recommendation to be at Edenbridge by the dinner-hour—so that it is doubtless calculated I could not get back again, on discovering the deceit, until long past midnight."

"And what will you do, William?" asked Angela, still with a trepidation of anxiety, though considerably reassured by what her brother had just said.

"What shall I do?" said William, thoughtfully repeating the question thus put to him: and then for a few moments he reflected deeply, "I tell you what I will do, Angela: I will start off at once for Edenbridge, and clear up all uncertainty as to the genuineness or

fabrication of the letter. If it be a forgery—as we have so much reason to suspect—I will return home at once. I can easily come back by three or four o'clock; and then aided by the advice which the Marquis will in the meantime have given me, I shall know how to act. You need be under no apprehension during my absence. Whatsoever treachery may be in contemplation, is to be reversed for the night-time. That is evident. Therefore fear not, my sweet sister. Not for an instant would I leave you unprotected, if I thought there was any danger."

Having embraced Angela, William Deveril issued forth from the villa. As he traversed the little garden in front, the old gardener, who appeared to be busy at work, stopped him with the accustomed touch of the hat; and asked him a question of a trivial nature in connexion with some shrub. William was about to hurry past, telling him that he had not time to attend to the matter at that moment,—when it struck him that the gardener surveyed him in a somewhat singular manner; and as this was not the first time that the same suspicion had occurred to our hero, he did stop and answered his questions.

"I see you are in a hurry now, sir," said the man; "or else I had several other things I wanted to speak to you about in connexion with the garden. But as I suppose you won't be more than an hour or two absent, as usual, I will wait till your return."

"You had better tell me now what you have to say," answered Deveril: "for I have some business which may detain me in town; and when I come home in the afternoon, I must be off at once to Edenbridge. I have received a letter from the Marquis of Eagledean, inviting me to dine with him this evening."

"While affecting to have his eyes fixed upon the particular shrubs to which the gardener had alluded, William was all the time scrutinizing, from beneath his long dark lashes, the countenance of the old man; and his original suspicion was confirmed, that this individual was in some way or another connected with the treachery which was being secretly plotted—that is to say, supposing his surmise to be correct that the letter from Edenbridge was a forgery. He remained conversing with the gardener for a few minutes; and then, pretending to have forgotten something, he re-entered the villa.

"My dear Angela," he said, "I feel convinced that there is something wrong about that gardener. I have frequently told you that he has for some weeks past come much oftener than he was bound to do according to the terms of our contract for keeping the garden in order—much oftener too than the garden itself requires at this season of the year. He has lingered and loitered about at times in a manner that struck me to be strange; and with an air of good-humoured familiarity he has frequently endeavoured to get me into conversation when I have been going out, as if he sought to learn whither I was proceeding and how long I should be absent. Just now his manner struck me as more than usually peculiar. In a word, I believe him to be a spy—But fear not Angela! Whoever our enemies may be, we will outwit them; and whatsoever may be their design, we will frustrate it."

"Do not think, William, that my fortitude will fail," responded his sister. "It is for you to adopt the course that you may think fit: I will remain here tranquilly until your return."

"You would do well, dearest Angela, not to breathe a word to the maid-servants that anything unusual has occurred. Go about your avocations with the same demeanour as heretofore. On the part of neither of us must the least evidence be shown that we suspect anything; so that the gardener, if he be really a spy, may go and inform his employers that this morning's letter has thrown us completely off our guard."

Angela promised compliance with her brother's instructions; and he then departed. Proceeding at once to the railway station, he took the first train to Edenbridge,—reaching the Park soon after mid-day. The Marquis at once pronounced the letter to be a forgery,—thus confirming Deveril's preconceived suspicion.

"But who can have done this?" asked our young hero: "who can my enemies be? and what object can they have in view?"

"These are questions," replied the Marquis of Eagledean, gravely, and after nearly a minute's consideration, "which naturally lead us to retrospect over past occurrences, and bring events to our minds, showing us who have acted in a hostile spirit on former occasions. Alas! I fear that my graceless nephew

Harold has not abandoned the career of wickedness: for I have recently received letters from Stockholm, which acquaint me that he is not in that city,—a piece of intelligence which seems to be confirmed by the fact that he has neither written to me, nor drawn for any pecuniary supplies. Yet it is difficult to conceive how he can entertain any perfidious intent with regard to your affairs."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated William; "if he were infamous enough to harbour the intent of carrying off Angela! He has seen her at the Opera; who knows but that he may have conceived a passion for her?"

"Or it may be," suggested the Marquis, "that there is something connected with that woman who has for so long a time been harboured at your abode. We know that she has some secret of the deepest importance to reveal—a secret intimately concerning yourself; but may not this secret likewise regard others, and even threaten to compromise them? If so, whatsoever hostile designs are in contemplation, may be levelled against her. It is however useless for us to waste time in conjecture: we must determine how to act."

It is not however necessary to record in this place the nature of the measures which were promptly resolved upon. Suffice it to say that a little past three o'clock in the afternoon William Deveril reached his villa near the Regent's Park. It was now verging towards the dusk, which sets in early at that season of the year; but the old gardener was still occupied with the shrubs and the plants, which certainly needed not so much care as he seemed intent on lavishing upon them. William was however careful, as he passed him by, not to show, by any change of demeanour towards the old man, that he suspected him of treachery: neither did he exhibit the haste and excitement of one who had just come from a journey. He entered the villa, and was speedily closeted with Angela. From her he learnt that scarcely had he taken his departure in the morning, when the gardener went away and did not return for an hour: but that ever since he had remained about the premises, to all appearance busily engaged. Deveril then informed his sister of all that had taken place at Edenbridge Park—how he had received the confirmations that the letter

was forgery—and how the Marquis had suggested certain measures which were to be adopted, not merely for the frustration of whatsoever treachery was being plotted, but likewise for the capture of its perpetrators.

It was now close upon four o'clock; and Deveril prepared to leave the house, as if he were on the point of proceeding to Edenbridge according to the intimation he had given to the old gardener. Angela learnt from one of the maids—who accidentally mentioned the circumstances—that the gardener was seated in the kitchen, to warm himself, as he said, after a hard and cold day's work. Angela lost no time in reporting this to her brother,—who remarked, "Yes, everything confirms my belief that he is a spy; and the circumstance of his remaining in the house is a mere pretext to enable him to watch whether I really take my departure or not. I will however do something that shall lull him still more deeply into such a belief."

Thereupon our hero descended to the kitchen premises, on some pretence or another; and when the old gardener saw him, he said, with that air of good-humoured familiarity which for some time past he had adopted, and which a person of his years might assume, "You will be late for the dinner, sir, at Edenbridge Park."

"Not so," responded William. "It is now only four: a cab will take me to the station in an hour—the train starts at five—and I shall reach my destination at half-past six. His lordship's dinner hour is seven."

Deveril then ascended to the hall—whispered a few hasty words to his sister, bidding her be of good cheer—and issued forth from the house, having a brace of pistols secured about his person.

We must now pass over a few hours, and suppose it to be about ten o'clock at night. In an up-stairs room—in a low public-house, situated in one of the worst streets in the worst part of Camden Town—four persons were assembled. These were Chiffin the Cannibal, Mat the Cadger, Spider Bill, and the old gardener. Of the first-mentioned of these worthies, it is by no means necessary to give the reader the slightest description; but of the second something may be said, inasmuch as he was a peculiar looking person in his way. He was accustomed to dress in a sort of sporting style, but

always in such shabby, greasy, sordid garments, that he might have been taken for a broken down horse-chaunter. Sometimes he wore top-boots—sometimes gaiters—but always corduroy breeches, very loose and baggy. A fustian shooting-jacket, or else a cut away green coat, with tarnished metal buttons, constituted the varieties of this portion of his costume: his waistcoat, which was generally of that green and yellow striped material worn by stablemen, came very far below his waist. A blue kerchief spotted with white, better known as a "bird's eye," was loosely folded several times round his neck, the ends being crossed over the front of a shirt which did not bear too narrow a scrutiny in respect to cleanliness. This neckerchief came nearly up to his mouth so that his chin was usually buried in it altogether; and this was not merely the case in winter when it was cold, but likewise in the summer, even in the dog-days. His hat was a sort of chimney-pot shape, but having seen such good service that the crown bulged upward, thus giving a conical appearance to the article. He was of middle height—strongly built—of muscular development and compact proportions. The expression of his countenance was that of thorough determination: indeed a more daring, resolute looking kind of a person it would be difficult to meet; and in this respect he quite equalled Chiffin the Cannibal. His eyes were dark and piercing: he had a snub nose—a very wide mouth—short ragged whiskers:—and his hair was so uneven that it appeared to have been hacked about by a pair of blunt scissors wielded by some drunken barber, the last time it was cut. He had a habit of resting his right hand upon his hip and assuming an attitude of boldest decision when engaged in conversation; and he likewise looked fixedly up with an insolent stare of defiance in the countenance of whomsoever he might wish to make an impression upon. In his earlier years he had been connected with the turf,—expending thereon the few hundreds of pounds which he inherited at the death of his father, who was a tradesman. He had then hung on, for some time, to the skirts, so to speak, of those individuals with whom his sporting proceedings had thrown him in contact; so that he was said to have "cadged" for his living—hence the surname he had acquired. Of late

years however he had sunk down very low, and had turned his hand to anything desperate—had fallen amongst the vilest of associates—had become the flash man of such "a disgusting woman as one of Widow Burley's daughters—and might therefore be classed amongst the foul refuse and most loathsome sweepings to be found in the great moral sewer which constitutes more than half of the modern Babylon.

As the above is no imaginary character, we have taken some little pains to describe him. In respect to Spider Bill, we need say no more than that he was so called from his peculiar shape and an extreme lanky length of limb. He also was as desperate a character as Chiffin the Cannibal or Mat the Cadger, and therefore well fitted to be their associate in any criminal undertaking.

We say it was ten o'clock; and those three villains, together with the old gardener, were drinking and smoking in the private room at the public house where we find them thus grouped together.

"Well," said Mat the Cadger, appealing to Chiffin, "I should think it is pretty near time for us to be off. The clock down stairs has just struck ten; and it's a good twenty minutes walk towards the villa. Besides which, we must separate and go different ways."

"We will be off directly," answered Chiffin: "but don't you dictate, old feller: 'cos why, I'm in command now."

"I suppose there isn't no doubt or it's all being square and straight for'ard this time," observed Spider Bill: "for there's been so many puts-off during I don't know how many weeks past—"

"To be sure!" growled Chiffin: "'cos why, Lord Harold is a muff in these things—and you chaps ain't much better. But here, you see, I have only been in the business two or three days, and it's going to be done as nice as possible. But I say, you feller," he added, turning to the gardener,—"you're certain sure that it's all right at the villa—eh?"

"I've told you so a dozen times," was the old man's response. "I'm certain that Deveril suspects nothing."

"But what do you think Mr. Deveril could have been about, all that while absent from home from ten in the morning till three in the afternoon?" inquired Chiffin.

"Why—courting, to be sure, down in Cavendish Square," replied the gardener; "and perhaps attending to business of some kind or another. But I'll answer for it that there's nothing wrong; because I waited in the garden as I've told you, till he came back at three o'clock; and he spoke as friendly and looked as happy as ever. Besides, didn't I tell you that I went into the kitchen and stopped till he set off to go to Edenbridge. He came down to get his upper coat brushed, and told me he was just about to start. In a word, when I went and told Lord Harold in the forenoon that all was right, I made sure it was; and so you will find it to be."

"Well, we'll take it for granted it is so," said Chiffin. "It isn't that I'm afraid, you know," he added, with a grim look as he glanced slowly round upon his companions: "but I don't like such a thing as a failure; and as we've only got half our reward paid down, and are to have t'other half when the job's done, I want to make as sure of the last as I am of the first."—and here he significantly tapped his pocket.

"Of course," observed Mat the Cadger, with an assenting nod.

"Then let's be off," said the Cannibal. "We don't want your services any more, old chap," he added, turning to the gardener: "so to you we say good bye."

The villains then issued forth one by one, and at intervals of a few minutes, from the public house—the three who were to be actively employed in the enterprise, taking different directions to gain the point of meeting, which had been already settled. This was in narrow and dark lane at no great distance from Deveril's house; and there a covered spring cart was waiting. The horse attached to it, was a strongly built as well as fleet animal; and a man in Lord Harold's pay was in charge of this equipage. Close by, too, Lord Harold himself was waiting. Enveloped in a rough pea-coat, and with a glazed hat, the large brims of which slouched over his countenance, he was pacing to and fro with some degree of impatience, the time for the appearance of his agents having elapsed by some minutes. At length they came one by one; and Chiffin, who was the first upon the spot, assured his lordship that it was all

right, for he had been closely questioning the gardener upon the subject.

"Then let us work at once," said the young nobleman: because when Deveril got to Edenbridge and found out that the latter was all a trick, he would naturally take the Marquis's carriage-and-four and return home. But that would make it past eleven o'clock; and so there is plenty of time, if we are expeditious."

"But about the up trains, my lord?" said Chiffin inquiringly.

"I took good care to ascertain," responded Harold, "that there are none which could serve his purpose so as to bring him up in time to interfere with us. Now then, you fellows, go on together: we will follow with the vehicle exactly five minutes after you leave, so that it won't have to stand long at the gate of the premises."

"Five minutes in advance will be ample," responded Chiffin. "If the inmates are in bed, we'll break into the house in a jiffy: but if they're still up it will be easier work still."

Having thus spoken, Chiffin led the way from the spot, closely followed by Mat the Cadger and Spider Bill; and in three minutes they were at the villa. The hall-lamp was still alight; and a candle was also burning in an up-stairs room—so that it was evident the inmates had not yet retired to rest. Chiffin's dispositions were speedily made: he was to enter by the front door, while his two companions were to effect their entry by the back part of the premises, and thus as it were take the place by storm. They were provided with black masks, which they put upon their countenances previous to commencing operations.

We will first follow Chiffin. He traversed the front garden and rang the house-bell,—having done which, he turned his back towards the door, so that the instant it should be opened the servant answering the summons, might not at the first glimpse catch sight of his mask. He was not kept long waiting: the door was opened—he made one step backward—caught the female by the throat—and kicked the door too with marvellous rapidity.

"Not a word! not a struggle!" he said, in the low hoarse whisper of his terrible voice: "or I'll throttle you!"

There was scarcely any need for this injunction, inasmuch as the young woman at once swooned with the awful terror which seized upon her.

Meanwhile Mat the Cadger and Spider Bill had leapt over the wall at the back of the premises; and stealing into the kitchen, they found the other two female servants (for the Deveril's kept there) seated at work. Mat sprang upon one—his companion on the other. The first who was thus assailed, gave vent to a slight scream—but only a slight one; for it was instantaneously stifled by the rude hand that gagged her lips:—while the other female was seized with too profound a dismay to cry out at all. They both received the hurried assurance that if they remained quiet no harm would befall them. Almost immediately afterwards footsteps were heard descending the stairs; and Chiffin appeared, bearing, the inanimate form of the housemaid who had answered the door.

"Now then," he said, with growling hastiness of tone, "let us put these women into some secure nook—and then for the rest of the business. Ah! there's the coal-cellar quite handy!"—and forthwith the door of that place was opened.

The two women who had not fainted, but over whose mouths rough hands were forcibly held, showed by their looks how wild was their terror. The villains repeated their assurances that no harm would befall them if they remained quiet: but they likewise vowed that the slightest scream would be instantaneously followed by the murder of all three. They were accordingly thrust into the coal-cellar; and the bolt was drawn upon them.

"Now then for up-stairs," said Chiffin; and he led the way, followed by his two accomplices.

As there had been no light perceived in the ground-floor rooms, they did not think it worth while to enter them; but they crept up towards that where the Cannibal had seen a candle burning. Angela—who was seated there, by the bed-side of Madge Somers,—heard the footsteps; and though a tremor shot through her form, she was not so much frightened as might have expected:—perhaps she knew that succour was near. She rose up from her chair—and the next instant the three ruffians with the black masks rushed into the room.

"Not a word, or you're dead!" ejaculated Mat the Cadger, as he caught hold of the young lady with one hand, and with the other produced a pistol from his pocket.

The sight of that weapon did strike a horrible alarm to the soul of Angela.

Mat the Cadger forced her down into the chair—whipped out a cord from his pocket—and in a moment bound her arms to the back of the seat,—at the same time renewing his horrible threats. While this was doing, Chiffin and Spider Bill seized upon Madge Somers and tore her from the bed. All this was the work of a few instants; and as a shriek did now vibrate from Angela's lips, Mat the Cadger placed the muzzle of his pistol close to her fair polished brow,—declaring, with a horrible imprecation, that he would blow her brains out if she did not hold her tongue.

But at this instant there was a hasty rush of footsteps up the stairs: and the next moment William Deveril, Don Diego Christoval, the young Lord Everton, and the Marquis of Eagledean made their appearance, each presenting pistols and bidding the villains surrender. Chiffin the Cannibal and Spider Bill dropped Madge Somers upon the carpet: but at the same instant the former was seized upon by the powerful arms of Count Christoval and hurled upon the floor—while Spider Bill was simultaneously overpowered by William Deveril. Mat the Cadger, dropping his weapon, made one rush to the casement—tore it open—and precipitated himself forth, just as Lord Everton clutched him by the skirts of his coat; so that it was a miracle the young nobleman was not dragged forth after him. The villain alighted upon a border under the window; and instantaneously picking himself up, rushed madly away. Almost immediately afterwards a vehicle might have been heard driving quickly off: for Lord Harold, who was so stationed below that he could command a view of that window, on perceiving this sudden descent and flight of Mat the Cadger, comprehended in a moment that the project had failed. He therefore hurried off the vehicle—while he himself fled precipitately in another direction, and in the wildest excitement lest the officers of justice should be upon his heels.

We must now for a few instants descend to the lower part of the premises, to announce that the captivity of the female-servants was not of long duration: for the door of the cellar was quickly opened by Francis Paton, who besought the terrified women not to give way to their alarms, nor do anything to raise the neighbourhood, as there were others in the house who

would prevent any farther ruffianism on the part of the intruders. Leaving the lady's maid and cook to recover the housemaid from her swoon, Francis sped upstairs—where the following spectacle at once met his eyes. While young Lord Everton had quickly closed the casement again, the Marquis of Eagledean cut the cords which bound Angela to the chair; and he then hastened to assist her in lifting Madge Somers back into the bed from which she had been so rudely torn. Just outside the threshold, Don Diego Christoval had one knee upon Chiffin's chest, a hand at his throat, and a pistol at his head; the mask had fallen from the ruffian's countenance, which wore a horrible expression of mingled rage, hate, and doggedness. Just inside that same threshold, Spider Bill was likewise upon the floor: his mask had also come off, and he looked terribly crestfallen, and frightened, as William Deveril kept him down in a similar manner to that adopted by the Spanish nobleman in respect to Chiffin.

"Search this fellow, Frank!" said Don Diego; "and take from him whatsoever weapons he may have about him."

The Cannibal's pistols and clasp-knife were speedily drawn forth from his pockets by Francis Paton: while Adolphus (Lord Everton) also disarmed Spider Bill.

"Now," said the Marquis of Eagledean, who had assisted Angela to replace Madge Somers in the couch, "let these two men be conducted down stairs; and let them understand well that at the slightest attempt at resistance, they will be shot through the head. Remorseless ruffians that they are, we may not hesitate to treat them as dogs if they thus provoke us!"

Don Diego Christoval and William Deveril accordingly suffered their prisoners to rise; and the room being soon cleared, Angela remained with Madge Somers,—who, having swooned off at first, was now rapidly recovering. In dogged sullenness did Chiffin descend the stairs: while Spider Bill appealed for mercy as he was made to follow.

"Silence!" exclaimed the Marquis of Eagledean in answer to the latter's entreaties: "you will hear what we have to say—and according as you respond to our queries, shall we deal with you."

The parlour on the ground-floor was reached—the lamp was lighted—and the prisoners were placed in such a position that they could not possibly escape from the guardianship of those who now had them in custody. We should not however forget to observe that ere descending from the chamber above, Francis Paton had lingered behind the rest for a single moment, to exchange a warm pressure of the hand and a fond look with Angela, in congratulation of the issue of this perilous adventure.

Perhaps also, ere resuming the thread of the narrative, it may be as well to pause for a few moments and describe how it was that such speedy succour was at hand. As the reader will have seen, the Marquis entertained the suspicion that his nephew Lord Harold had some connexion with the impending treachery: for he thought he could discover traces of the young nobleman's writing in the imitation of his own hand in the forged letter. Judging from antecedent circumstances, he had come to the conclusion that if his nephew were really so connected with the plot, whatever it might be,—Lady Saxondale was also sure to be in it. It was therefore necessary to fathom the whole proceeding to the very bottom; and, still anxious to save his nephew from the ignominy of figuring in a criminal tribunal, the Marquis of Eagledean had decided upon adopting the measure of watching inside the villa, so as to not merely frustrate the intended treachery, but also capture whomsoever might be found entering the premises. That there would not be many persons whose arrival might be thus expected, was naturally judged from the circumstance that means had been taken to get William Deveril out of the way, so that only a few women would have to be dealt with. The nature of the arrangement devised by the Marquis had been duly communicated to Angela by her brother, when he returned from Edenbridge. Indeed he came up to London from the Park with the Marquis, Lord Everton, Francis Paton, and Count Christoval,—this last-mentioned personage being on a visit there at the time. Nothing however was said to the female servants at the villa,—for fear lest at the very first alarm they should be led to call out for succour notwithstanding any injunctions to the contrary, and

thus prompt the expected intruders to take to a precipitate flight—thereby frustrating the hope of the Marquis to make them prisoners and fathom the entire proceeding to the bottom. It was regarded as a matter of certainty that blood would not be shed uselessly by the agents of the dark and mysterious treachery which was impending,—and that whosoever came would be contented with binding the female servants and intimidating them by threats into silence.

Such were the calculations, the motives, and the plans of the Marquis of Eagledean. We should further observe that, at about ten o'clock, Angela, who was on the watch, descended gently from the sick woman's room, while the servants were in the kitchen; and noiselessly opening the front door, she gave admittance to her brother, the Marquis, the Count, Adolphus, and Francis Paton,—who all five forthwith ensconced themselves in the breakfast-parlour leading out of the hall; and there they remained in the dark until the time for action arrived. Of what followed, the reader is already aware: the old scheme, as arranged by the Marquis, ended in success, and without the intervention of the police—an alternative which he had been so anxious to avoid. But he did not anticipate to encounter in one of the ruffians, Chiffin the Cannibal, whom he presumed to be at the time far away across the sea, on the American soil.

We may now resume the thread of our narrative, and describe what took place between the prisoners and their captors in the parlour.

"You have been taken," said the Marquis of Eagledean, addressing the prisoners, "in an attempt to carry off an unfortunate invalid woman, whom *your* knife,"—and here he fixed his eyes upon the Cannibal,—"*nearly* devoted to death. This is a proceeding of so extraordinary as well as outrageous a nature, that it must have had no unimportant instigation. As I have already observed, we shall deal with you according to your answers to my questions."

"And what if we confess everything?" demanded Spider Bill eagerly.

The Marquis of Eagledean did not immediately reply: his soul revolted from the idea of again letting loose the Cannibal upon society:—and yet when he reflected upon all the reasons which his daughter Elizabeth Paton had advanced against making an enemy of

Chiffin at that time when he was entangled with her stratagem at Edenbridge Park, he felt that he could not do otherwise than let the man go. But while reduced to this alternative, he made up his mind on the present occasion to adopt some measure to ensure the Indian's departure from England.

"If you confess everything," he accordingly said, in answer to Spider Bill's question, "no harm shall befall you."

"And does that apply to me, my lord?" asked Chiffin, in a sullen growling voice.

"Yes," was the response.

"Well then, here goes for confession!" exclaimed the Cannibal, with a savage exultation. "It was your lordship's own nephew, Lord Harold Staunton, which got up all this business."

"Yes—that it was!" cried Spider Bill; "and what's more, me and that man which bolted just now, have been upon the watch for I don't know how many weeks to do the job. But you, sir," turning to William Deveril, "was always in the way——"

"Ah! while I bethink me," observed our hero, "was not that gardener of mine privy to what was going on?"

"He was, sir," rejoined Spider Bill.

At this moment the door opened; and Angela made her appearance, with a singularly excited expression of countenance. She beckoned William Deveril to follow her; and the Marquis of Eagledean, thinking that something of importance had occurred, accompanied his young friend from the room; but not before he had made a sign to Count Christoval, Lord Everton and Frank, to keep a strict guard over the prisoners.

The Marquis and William Deveril accompanied Angela into the breakfast-parlour, whither she led them, and where a light was burning. They both noticed that she still continued to manifest a considerable degree of excitement: there was a visible tremor throughout her charming form; and she flung quick as well as singular glances upon Deveril, —glances in which a certain degree of timidity and bashfulness was blended with that excitement which was inspiring her.

"What has happened, Angela?" inquired the Marquis, quickly.

"Hasten to tell us, dear sister?" exclaimed Deveril, also in acute suspense.

"Sister!"—and she echoed the word in a strange and involuntary manner:

with considerable rapidity of utterance, she went on to say, "The woman has recovered the faculty of speech. Doubtless the shock which she has sustained, produced a strong revolution in her entire being——But no matter what may be the cause: the effect is as I tell you—and it is indeed of stupendous importance to you, William! It however seems to me like a dream——I am afraid my thoughts are bewildered——perhaps I heard not right——and yet she spoke plainly—I made her repeat the words. But come you both, and hear them with your own ears, and from her own lips, that you may judge for yourselves."

Having thus spoken, Angela issued quickly from the room,—while the Marquis of Eagledean and William Deveril, exchanging rapid glances of wonderment and suspense, hastened to follow her. They both felt that they were upon the threshold of the knowledge of some grand important secret; but neither of them could form the slightest conjecture what it might be. Still under the influence of a strange and wild excitement, Angela tripped up the stairs, and conducted William and the Marquis into the invalid's chamber. Madge Somers was now propped up with several pillows; and there was a faint hectic tinge of excitement upon the haggard hollow cheeks—or rather upon the shallow skin where the cheek bones were prominent. Her eyes lighted up with an expression of joyous satisfaction, as she encountered the looks of William Deveril, whom she beckoned to approach close to the couch.

"Now," said Angela, her voice losing somewhat of its excitement in the gentle kindness with which she habitually spoke to the invalid,—"repeat those words which you are now breathed twice in my ears."

"I will," responded the woman, in a faint, feeble, and almost dying tone—but still one that was clearly audible, as well as unmistakable in the syllable to which it gave utterance: then, fixing her eyes steadfastly upon our young hero, she said, "Prepare yourself to hear that solemn truth which I am about to proclaim, and which I see that Miss Deveril has not ventured to communicate——Prepare yourself, I say: for [it is a truth that will startle you with the wildest amazement! You are not the brother of this amiable and excellent young lady—you are not the

child of the poor wandering players—you are the son of Lady Saxondale!

CHAPTER CLXII.

THE RIGHTFUL HEIR OF

SAXONDALE.

WILD indeed was the amazement experienced by our hero at this intelligence—an amazement which was to an equal extent felt by the Marquis of Eagledean. So powerful a sensation of faintness almost immediately seized upon our hero, that he staggered back and was compelled to lean against the wall for support. Angela, perceiving how great was the effect which the announcement had produced upon him hastened to bear him a tumbler of water: but it was with a sort of timid bashfulness that she presented it. He drained its contents: then, observing the expression of her countenance, and instantaneously comprehending what was passing in her mind, he caught her in his arms,—exclaiming, “Oh, dearest Angela! even if all this be not a dream—if it be not a fevered fancy on the part of that poor woman—if, in a word, it be a stern and solemn truth,—you are not the less my sister! For think you that any circumstances could possibly diminish the brotherly love which I bear towards you? No—never, never, my darling Angela!”

The young lady wept profusely as she received these assurances; and the Marquis of Eagledean was likewise much affected.

“If it be a dream?” exclaimed Madge Somers, speaking in a much stronger and more excited tone than at first. “No, no—it is not a dream! Have you not the mark of strawberry upon your shoulder?”

“Yes!” ejaculated our hero. Here!—and he placed his hand upon the spot.

“To be sure,” continued Madge. “I saw it when you were at that cottage in Lincolnshire, at the time you so generously saved my life from the waters of the Trent.”

“But that young man, then,” said the Marquis of Eagledean, scarcely yet recovered from the bewilderment into which he had been thrown,—“that young man, I say, who passes before the world as Lord Saxondale?”

“That young man,” answered Madge Somers, in a solemn voice and with a corresponding expression of the countenance, “is my own son!”

Here was another subject for ineffable astonishment; and for some moments not another word was spoken: but those who were present in that room, surveyed each other with a sort of solemn awe, as if they deeply felt how mysteriously and inscrutably the ways of Providence are worked out. But at length the Marquis of Eagledean, breaking that silence, began to question Madge Somers farther. A faintness had however now come over the woman: a reaction set in from the excitement which for the last few minutes she had undergone; and she only shook her head to indicate that she was no longer able to exercise the faculty of speech.

“She must be kept quiet,” suggested Angela. “I know full well how to treat her: leave her in my hands. But perhaps, dear William,” continued the young lady, drawing our hero aside, and speaking in a whispering voice,—“for after the kind and considerate assurances you have given me, I shall still call you by that name—I shall still address you as a brother—”

“Oh, Angela! infinite would be my affliction,” responded our hero, “if you were to treat me otherwise:”—and taking her hand, he pressed it with the most affectionate warmth. “Now continue, my dear sister—for as such you must ever be regarded by me: continue, I say, the suggestions you were about to offer.”

“It is but too evident,” proceeded Angela, “that this poor woman has for long years been privy to a foul wrong committed towards yourself: but she is penitent—she is anxious to make all possible amends—and it will doubtless contribute towards her mental peace, and therefore to her physical recovery, if you give her some assurance—”

“I comprehend you, dearest Angela—and I admire more than ever the noble generosity of your heart:”—then approaching the bed, our hero took the emaciated hand of the invalid, and said in a solemn voice, “Here, in the presence of her whom I love as a very dear sister—in the presence of that nobleman who has been to us both the most generous of friends—and likewise with an attesting heaven to listen to my words,—do I declare that I forgive you, my poor woman, for whatsoever

wrong you may have done me!—Yes, I forgive you—and may God forgive you likewise!”

“My lord,” murmured Madge Somers, now again for a few moments recovering the faculty of speech, “this generosity on your part is more than I could have expected. But as through me you have for many years been deprived of your rights, it is a satisfaction amounting to a bliss that I should be the first at length to salute you by that title which is properly and truly your’s, and which the law will recognise. For as I have a soul to be saved, you are the rightful heir of Saxondale—and may heaven give you long life to bear that proud name which though desecrated in others, will be honoured in you!”

Madge Somers was again overcome by the transitory paroxysm of excitement which had enabled her to give utterance to that speech; and Angela made a sign of entreaty that our hero and the Marquis of Eagledale would now withdraw. They did so: and on descending the stairs, the former drew the Marquis into the breakfast-parlour—closing the door, so that they alone there together.

“Now, my dear young friend,” said Lord Eagledale, embracing our hero with an affection truly paternal—“let me congratulate you upon the knowledge of a momentous secret which gives you that title and that wealth from which you have been so long and so iniquitously debarred!”

“My dear lord,” was the young nobleman’s response. “accept my fervent gratitude for these congratulations which you proffer me; but my mind is made up to one thing:”—and he spoke in a tone expressive of the firmest resolve, while his countenance corroborated his words.

“You do not mean to tell me,” cried the Marquis, more than half-suspecting what he was about to hear, “that you reject—?”

“I mean, my generous friend,” interrupted our hero, “that I shall continue plain and simple William Deveril. By that name therefore I beseech you to address me as heretofore: nor to those in the other room—no, not even to your own son—must be revealed that secret which we have just learnt!”

“This is madness! this is impossible,” ejaculated the Marquis vehemently; and he even spoke in anger—the first time that ever he had been angry with our hero.

“Do not reproach me, my best of friends,” said the young man entreatingly, but still with an expression of firmest resolve upon his countenance “Give me your attention—I will explain my motives for that course on which I am inflexibly determined; and your own kind heart will sympathize with my feelings”

“Proceed,” said the Marquis, but with a voice and manner which showed that it would be difficult indeed to bring him over to his young friend’s views.

“Has it not occurred to you,” resumed the latter, “that if I profit by the information which we have just received from that woman’s lips, I bring down utter ruin upon my own mother? It is not but too evident that she—the authoress of my being—as perpetrated—I cannot speak the word!”

“The foulest of crimes!” ejaculated the Marquis, almost fiercely. “She has brought up a stranger to supplant her own offspring! Yes—there can be no doubt that you will involve her in ruin: but really, my young friend, this is a case in which you cannot stand upon such punctilios. There breathes not a man who would more earnestly inculcate the necessity of filial love, and duty, and forbearance towards a mother—but such a mother!”

“Nevertheless,” added our hero, “she is *still* my mother; and not for worlds would I adopt measures which must hold her up to the scorn and the execration of the whole world—nay, more—measures that would compel the law to take cognizance of her misdeed and visit her with some terrible punishment!”

“Admirable young man!” exclaimed the Marquis of Eagledale, his better feelings bursting forth with a gush of enthusiasm that absorbed his transitory resentment and impatience, and sent forth tears from his eyes.

“Oh! I am rejoiced,” exclaimed William Deveril—for such we must continue to call him, inasmuch as it was his own will to be so denominated,—“I rejoice to perceive that you at last yield to the strength of my reasoning, and that you no longer oppose the course which I am resolved to adopt.”

“But will you not make your mother aware,” inquired the Marquis, “that you are acquainted with the secret of your birth?”

“Yes—assuredly,” answered Deveril: “because it is evident that she fear

the revelation which the invalid woman has made to us——"

"And perhaps, in her desperation," added the Marquis, "when she finds that to-night's plot has so signally failed—a plot to the carrying out of which there can be no doubt she instigated my wretched nephew—she will adopt some extreme measure to take the very life of Madge Somers. Have I not now expressed the motives which influence you, when you say that you will see your mother and inform her that you are acquainted with the mystery of your birth?"

"Yes—those are the paramount motives," responded our hero. "But I am likewise desirous to relieve her mind from the terrible anxiety into which it must be plunged on account of this tremendous secret which she knows full well the woman Somers would sooner or later reveal. Moreover, you can full well comprehend, my dear Marquis, that it will be to me a source of satisfaction to tell my mother that I forgive her for all the past—to endeavour to move her to at least some little display of parental affection——"

But here Deveril suddenly stopped short and became pale as death; for the remembrance flashed to his mind, accompanied by a sickening sensation, that his own mother had at one time made to him overtures of love—a love which had he yielded to the temptation would have been horrible to think of!

"Let not that circumstance trouble you, my young friend," said the Marquis, in a kind and soothing manner—for he full easily penetrated what was passing in William's mind. "No—let it not trouble you more than it has heretofore done: for your mother of course knew not at the time that you were her own son——Indeed, there is no reason to believe that she knows it now; inasmuch as her measures have been taken to prevent Madge Somers from revealing to any one the secret which she—your mother—deems and hopes to be still a secret locked up in that woman's heart. But we must hasten back to the other room, where our prolonged absence has doubtless already created much astonishment—perhaps uneasiness."

"And your lordship," said Deveril, "will suffer those two men to depart? You will not, by invoking the aid of the law, create an inevitable exposure of all that has occurred——"

"I will suffer them to depart,"

answered Lord Eagledean. "Think you, William, that I would do aught inimical to your wishes? No—not for worlds!"

"And you will likewise, my generous friend," said our hero, "keep the secret——"

"From everybody!" responded the Marquis emphatically. "Yes—I will do so, because there is in my mind the deeply-seated conviction that heaven itself, in spite of your own noble forbearance, will sooner or later bring all these mysterious transactions to light; and I shall yet have to welcome you as Lord Saxondale in the presence of the world."

William shook his head slowly and solemnly, in deprecation of this prophecy; and he followed the Marquis from the room. On re-entering the opposite apartment, all eyes were at once turned upon them both: but Lord Eagledean hastened to observe that it was only in connexion with the critical position of the invalid woman they had been summoned forth by Angela,—adding that the poor creature was much better and past all danger.

"I have now to decide," he went on to observe, "upon the measures which are to be adopted in respect to you two,"—fixing his eyes upon the prisoners. "First, in regard to you," he said, now addressing himself specially to Spider Bill: "you are at liberty to depart hence. Should you encounter your accomplice who ere now saved himself by a precipitous flight—or that traitorous gardener who has been playing the part of a vile spy—you may tell them both, that for certain reasons a merciful course has been resolved upon, and that they have nothing to fear—but that it will be well for them to forbear from lightly mentioning the name of Lord Harold Staunton, their employer in the misdeed. Go—begone!"

The reader need scarcely be informed that Spider Bill lost not a moment in availing himself of the permission thus accorded; and muttering a few words of thanks, he precipitately left the house.

"With regard to you, infamous villain that you are—most unscrupulous, daring, and iniquitous of evil doers," continued the Marquis, now addressing himself to the Cannibal, "if you had your merits, the transition would be from this apartment to a cell in Newgate. But mercy shall again be extended towards you—yet under certain conditions which I will

explain in as few words as possible. I happen to have the means of ensuring your safe exit out of the country. Within the hour that is passing, a post-chaise will be ordered, and two of my companions here will take you with them to Dover—whence you will at once be embarked for France. There at least you will be in safety; and if you choose to seek Havre de Grace, you may embark thence for America where you will find the remittance which some time back I made to New York on your account. Christoval, one word with you!”

The Marquis drew Don Diego into a corner of the room, and said to him in a whispering voice—“You must accompany this man to Dover. Lord Everton shall likewise go with you. Through the assistance of the Marshalls and of Edward Russell, his safe passage to the Continent can doubtless be ensured. Let measures be taken to the effect that not one farthing of money shall the wretch receive until he sets foot on the French coast. Deveril will lend him a cloak, and whatsoever other articles of apparel may help to render him a more decent object than he now is; and Frank shall issue forth at once and order a post chaise.”

The arrangements thus suggested by the Marquis, were duly carried out; and Chiffin the Cannibal took his departure in the custody—for such it really was—of Don Diego Christoval and Adolphus. We may as well observe here, that the entire plan, as laid down in respect to Chiffin, was executed; and through the agency of Ned Russell, he was safely landed at Calais. But whether he eventually got so far as the United States will be seen ere this narrative, which now draws towards a conclusion, is brought to a complete close.

Don Diego Christoval and Lord Everton having taken their departure with Chiffin the Cannibal, the Marquis of Eagledean and Francis Paton stayed at the villa to pass the night—or rather the reminder of it: for it was close upon one o'clock in the morning ere the inmates of that dwelling could think of retiring to rest. But even then, Angela Deveril would not seek her own couch. The servants had been too much alarmed and excited by the incidents of the night to render it prudent to allow either of them to sit up and attend upon Madge Somers. It should be observed that the nurse who was at first engaged to watch the invalid had within the last few days

been herself very ill, and had returned to her own residence, which was at a little distance: but Angela having entertained the hope that the woman would return shortly and resume her duties, had not considered it necessary to put another in her place. Thus the absence of the nurse—which was duly reported by the old gardener—had been deemed by the conspirators one of the favourable circumstances for the execution of their plot at that particular time. Now, however, Angela missed the nurse much; for she herself was exhausted by the mental and physical excitement she had undergone: yet neither the fortitude nor the generous spirit of the young lady failed; and believing herself better capable than the servants of keeping the requisite vigil by the couch of Madge Somers, she resolved to adopt this course. It had been with considerable reluctance that William Deveril consented to her thus wearying herself by sitting up with the invalid; and he only desisted from remonstrance on receiving the assurance that another nurse should be procured early in the morning, in case the one who was formerly engaged, continued too much indisposed to resume her duties.

But our hero, the Marquis of Eagledean, and Francis Paton had not been many minutes in their respective chambers, when Angela called forth to them, in an affrighted voice, from the invalid's room; and they quickly hurried thither. A terrible change had suddenly taken place in Madge Somers: it was evident that she was dying. Francis sped off to fetch the medical attendant: one of the female domestics was summoned to assist Angela in doing all that possibly could be done for the unfortunate woman in the extremity to which she was brought: but human succour was unavailing—consciousness had abandoned her—the glaze of death came over her eyes—the ominous rattle in the throat commenced—and a few minutes after the return of Francis Paton with the medical man, she breathed her last.

Thus did she perish. Not another syllable beyond the few explanations already recorded, fell from her lips; and the circumstances so nearly and intimately relating to William Deveril's earliest years of existence, were left still involved in a mystery which seemed to be impenetrable.

CHAPTER CLXIII

MOTHER AND SON

LADY SAXONDALE knew that the scheme for the carrying-off of Madge Somers was to be put into execution on the particular night the incidents of which we have been describing: she also knew that Lord Harold Staunton purposed to accompany Chiffin the Cannibal in the hired van, in order to bear away the woman to some distant spot, where she might be disposed of in a manner that would silence her for ever. Her ladyship did not therefore expect any communication from Lord Harold during that night—nor perhaps for a day or two until all should be over in respect to Madge Somers. His silence and his non-appearance would be to her a sufficient indication that the plot had thoroughly succeeded, and that the woman who was so much dreaded by her need no longer be regarded as an object of terror. Therefore her ladyship had gone to rest at her usual hour,—having seen Edmund reel off to his own room in a state of complete intoxication.

But Lady Saxondale had not been half-an-hour in her own chamber, and her night-toilet was scarcely completed,—indeed, her maid was still combing out the masses of that luxuriant raven hair which neither time nor the influence of strong passions and the powerful workings of her mind had streaked with a single thread of silver,—when a loud knock and ring resounded through the dwelling. Her ladyship started up with dismay—for it instantaneously struck her that the plot had failed; and then there was a perfect gush of horrifying apprehensions through her tortured brain. But quickly recovering her presence of mind, when she saw that the maid was gazing upon her in a perfect consternation, she bade her hasten down stairs and see who the visitor might be. We should observe that this maid was not Lucilla, the one who had been so frightened by the incursion of Chiffin and Lord Harold Staunton into the room which she had appropriated to herself at Saxondale Castle during the absence of her mistress; for her ladyship had left Lucilla behind in Lincolnshire, inasmuch as she had foreseen that on returning to London she would have to receive visits from Lord Harold, and she of course did not wish the young nobleman to stand the chance of encountering that maid in

in whose presence he could not do otherwise than look particularly foolish.

When left alone in her dressing-room, while her dependant hastened down to ascertain who had knocked and rung in so peremptory a manner, Lady Saxondale said to herself, "Some new crisis is now at hand!"—and as she glanced at the mirror opposite to which she was standing, she saw that her countenance was of a dead pallor. Then, clasping her hands in a paroxysm of mental anguish, she bitterly repented having ever entered upon a career of crime:—in that dread moment she would have given worlds to recall the past! But she was not a woman to remain long thus overpowered by her terror: she felt the necessity of exerting all her strength of mind to meet whatsoever danger might now be menacing her, and to encounter with fortitude whatsoever new emergency might have arisen. Feeling convinced that the visitor must be either Lord Harold, or else some messenger from him, she threw on a morning wrapper; and scarcely had she done this, when the maid returned to the room with the expected intimation. Harold Staunton craved an immediate audience of her ladyship on most particular business.

"You need not wait up for me," said Lady Saxondale to the maid: and having given this injunction, she descended to the parlour into which the footman who answered the front door, had conducted Lord Harold.

The moment her ladyship entered, she perceived by the young nobleman's countenance that the plot had failed: for he was very much excited and had a bewildered look.

"You have not succeeded, Harold?" said her ladyship, in a quick trembling voice,

"No: everything has miscarried—and yet I know not how," he replied, as he threw himself upon a sofa, much exhausted; for he had run all the way from the Regent's Park to Saxondale House.

"You know not how?" ejaculated her ladyship. "But what are the circumstances? Tell me all you do know! leave me not in suspense!"

"Everything was carried out in the manner previously settled, up to a certain point. The vehicle was in readiness—the fellows entered the house—they remained there for two

or three minutes—I thought it was all right—when all of a sudden the bedroom window was flung open, and out sprang one of them—a gentleman, whom I could not recognise making a clutch at him as he thus precipitated himself from the casement.”

“But the man——was he captured? was he killed? or did he escape, and tell you what had happened?”—and as Lady Saxondale put these questions in a hurried tone, her countenance exhibited all the tortures of suspense.

“He told me nothing; he sped wildly away,” answered Harold: “and I, seeing that all was lost, took my own departure from the spot.”

“And the other men—what became of them?”

“I cannot tell. One thing is certain, it was not Chiffin who thus made his escape. I fear therefore that he and the other agent whom we employed, were made prisoners.”

“Good heavens! what is to be done?” ejaculated Lady Saxondale. “If those men have been taken captive—perhaps by the police lying in wait—they will reveal everything! they will say that they were engaged by you——”

But all in a moment Lady Saxondale experienced a relief, arising from the selfish reflection which suddenly struck her, that her name could not possibly have been mentioned in the business. At least Harold had all along promised that this secrecy should be observed, and had assured her that he had faithfully kept his pledge.

“You, at all events, have nothing to fear,” he hastened to say, “so far as the night’s work is concerned. Of course you know best how far and in what way the woman Madge Somers can compromise you, should she recover the faculty of speech——But I—what am I to do? I dare not return to my lodging—those fellows know where I lived—and if they confess who was their employer——”

“True!” observed Lady Saxondale; “it will be serious for you. You had better leave London at once——”

“To-night I can do nothing,” answered Harold, with a sort of dogged determination. “I am tired to death, and unfit for any energetic proceeding. Besides, Harriet, I am not going to separate again from you. Our destinies are linked——”

“But I cannot harbour you here, Harold!” interrupted her ladyship. “It is

impossible! The servants will know it——Edmund will know it——”

“They already more than suspect that you and I are not very great strangers to each other,” interrupted Harold. “You would not have me go wandering forth to-night. Look at this costume—this glazed hat—this great rough coat. Do I not seem like a ruffian? how can I present myself at any hotel to ask for a bed? I may be arrested in the streets: who knows what hue and cry may be already raised after me?”

There was a mingling of entreaty and dogged determination in Staunton’s looks and accents, as he thus spoke in a hurried manner. Lady Saxondale saw that it would be dangerous to provoke a quarrel with him; and she herself was getting so desperately reckless as to her own reputation, that she came to the conclusion it would be better to let him have his own way.

“Well,” she accordingly said, “I must secrete you in the house as cautiously as I can. Fortunately I have dismissed my maid for the night. To-morrow we shall doubtless learn from some source or another the extent of the exposure which has taken place, and of the peril which menaces you. Then our measures can be taken. Perhaps the vortex of ruin——But no matter! it is too late to retrograde a single step. Come!”

They issued forth together from the parlour; and Lady Saxondale, opening and closing the front door, said in a loud voice, “Good night, Lord Harold!” which words were uttered in order to deceive any of the domestics who might possibly be listening to what was going on.

Staunton did not however leave the house; but with the utmost caution he followed Lady Saxondale up to her own chamber; and in the embraces of illicit passion they both forgot for a while the perils which, jointly or separately, they might have to apprehend. In the morning her ladyship told her maid, when the latter knocked at the door, that she could dispense with her services for the occasion; and thus Lord Harold’s presence there remained unsuspected. His pea-coat and glazed hat were carefully locked up in a cupboard; and Lady Saxondale, watching an opportunity when no one was upon the stairs, conducted him down to the breakfast-parlour—so that when a servant entered, it might appear as if he had just arrived to pay this early visit. She was compelled to leave to chance any suspicion

which might be entertained as to the real truth of the proceeding—and any inquiries which the footman might put to the hall-porter as to whether the young nobleman had indeed come that morning, or whether he had been several hours concealed beneath that roof.

Edmund remained in bed until a late hour; and it was not until Lady Saxondale and Lord Harold had finished their breakfast, that he made his appearance in the parlour. He was glad to see the young nobleman: he wanted society—and the presence of Staunton there seemed to promise a renewal of their former intimacy. He could not however prevent himself from smiling significantly at her ladyship—as much as to intimate that he understood very well upon what terms she was with Staunton: but the depraved and unprincipled young man—so deeply criminal too—was inspired by no loathing nor disgust at the thought of sitting down to table with his mother's paramour: for that she was really his mother, he of course believed, though the reader is now aware of the contrary.

It was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, that a footman entered the parlour where they were all three seated, and informed Lady Saxondale that Mr. Deveril requested an immediate audience.

"Let him be shown to the drawing-room," replied her ladyship, without losing her self-possession: but she glanced significantly at Lord Harold, as much as to say that now the worst was likely to be known.

"Ah, William Deveril!" ejaculated Edmund, as the footman retired. "I wonder at his impudence in coming to the house——"

"Trouble yourself not with him or his concerns," said Lady Saxondale in a severe tone: and as she had regained all her empire over ill-conditioned mind of the guilty young man, he at once held his peace.

Lord Harold followed her ladyship out into the hall—and said in a low, hurried, anxious whisper. "What do you think of Deveril's presence here?"

"I know not," she responded her own eyes glittering with uneasiness: "but still I hope that no public exposure of last night's proceedings has taken place. If so, William Deveril would scarcely call upon me. His presence here seems indicative of a desire to save that exposure: but it is evident my name

has been disagreeably mixed up in the transaction. Remain you quiet until I rejoin you."

Lord Harold returned into the parlour—while Lady Saxondale ascended to the drawing-room. She was filled with a nervous anxiety, which not all the natural strength of her mind could repress. She had not told Lord Harold the full extent of what she apprehended from Deveril's visit: her guilty soul was smitten with the horrible thought that Madge Somers had possibly revealed her secret; but if so, the reader may still understand that she was utterly unaware that William Deveril was her own son.

She proceeded to the drawing-room, assuming as well as she was able that dignified hauteur and calm stateliness of demeanour which she was wont to wear, and beneath which she was so often enabled to conceal the agitation of her soul. The moment she opened the door, she perceived Deveril standing near a window, and with his back towards her. Not that our young hero was gazing forth upon any particular object: he was looking on vacancy: for all his powers of vision were, so to speak, turned inwardly to the contemplation of the varied emotions and thoughts that were excited in his breast. He was about to stand once more in the presence of her who had been a bitter and a remorseless enemy to him—but whom he now knew to be the authoress of his being! No marvel, then, if his soul were thus agitated: he felt that the interview about to take place was one of no ordinary character. He did not hear the door open, so absorbed was he in his meditations; and it was not until the sounds of footsteps close behind him fell upon his ear, that he turned abruptly—thus finding himself face to face with Lady Saxondale.

His countenance was exceeding pale, but inscrutable in its expression—though the dark eyes of her ladyship were instantaneously bent keenly and piercingly upon him, in order to ascertain, if possible, whether he came with an intent of resolute hostility, or whether his visit might be otherwise construed. He could not immediately speak: he knew not how to commence the explanations he had to give. At one moment he felt inclined to fling himself into the arms of Lady Saxondale, claiming her as his parent: but the next instant the harrowing reflection swept through his brain that it

was possible she might repudiate him—she might disown him—she might refuse to acknowledge that claim which he had to assert. On her side, she was equally at a loss how to address him,—not knowing what his object might be, or to what extent she was once more in his power. Thus did they stand for nearly a minute, gazing upon each other in silence—a silence that was painful enough for William Deveril, and full of suspense for Lady Saxondale.

At length William Deveril felt so completely overpowered by the emotions, which were working so strongly within, though their outward expression was comparatively so slight,—that he was compelled to take seat. Indeed, it was with an air of utter mental and physical exhaustion that he sank down upon a chair. Then Lady Saxondale perceived that he was under the influence of feelings which could not be altogether of a vindictive or hostile character; and she took courage: for wherever she saw an opportunity of playing upon the sensibilities of individuals, she knew that a strong weapon was in her own hand, and that her powers of consummate dissimulation and hypocrisy would enable her to derive immense advantages from the weakness of those with whom she had to deal. She did not break the silence which prevailed: but she also took a seat—and appeared to be patiently awaiting whatsoever explanation was about to be given; while in reality she was suffering her visitor to abandon himself more and more to the influence of the sentiments which had possession of him.

"I know not how to address you," he at length said, in a voice which was tremulous and half-suffocated with his emotions. "Bear with me a few minutes! think not my conduct intentionally rude; however strange it may appear."

"Take your own time, Mr. Deveril," said Lady Saxondale, forcing herself to assume even a degree of affability. "I am well pleased that you thus seem enabled to throw aside old rancours and animosities——"

"Rancours and animosities!" echoed Deveril, with almost a wild start, as a thousand reminiscences of the past swept through his mind. Would to heaven that they had never existed!—Would to heaven that no angry word had ever

been breathed from either of us towards each other!"

"What mean you?" asked Lady Saxondale, for a moment smitten with the idea that possibly he had repented of having rejected the overture of her love at the time that it was made, and had now come to fling himself at her feet.

"What do I mean," he cried trembling all over with the effect of his emotions; and now the tears likewise trickled down his cheeks: "how can I make the revelation? how will you receive it? Is it possible that nature has no voice on these occasions? No, no—it has not!" he quickly ejaculated: "or else——"

But he stopped suddenly short, shocked at that occurrence the recollection of which thus flashed vividly back to his mind: for he meant to have said that if nature had really such a voice, it would have spoken out at the time when that very overture of love itself was made. Lady Saxondale was bewildered by his words and his manner; and yet every fresh step which he advanced along the troubled pathway of his agitated feelings and excited emotions, gave additional relief to her soul: for she saw that he came not for the purpose of injuring her.

"Last night," he said, suddenly forcing himself to be calm, "a strange scene took place at my abode. The house was invaded by ruffians: fortunately the plot in some of its details was too clumsily managed to succeed; and precautions were taken to frustrate it."

"A plot?" said Lady Saxondale, assuming a look of surprise and interest.

"Oh! do not tell me that you were a stranger to it," cried Deveril: "let there henceforth be no deception on your part towards me! If all the past can be forgotten—as, on my soul! it is forgiven on my side—we should look each other in face with the frank confidence of other and better feelings."

"If you wish us to be friends, Mr. Deveril," said her ladyship, now smiling with the utmost amiability, "it shall be so with all my heart."

"Friends?" he ejaculated, with passionate vehemence: then suddenly resuming a degree of calmness again, he went on to observe, "But I had not finished the tale I have to tell. The plot, was as I have informed you, frustrated: it was to carry off that

woman who was beneath my roof—

"Ah! and the plotters—what became of *them*?" inquired Lady Saxondale eagerly.

"They were suffered to depart," responded Deveril. "Let me assure you at once that you have nothing to fear: no public exposure ensued—no authority of the law was invoked on the occasion! Neither do I come hither to distress you—Would to heaven that nothing had ever occurred to compel me at one time to take a hostile attitude towards you! But that woman of whom I have spoken and who died last night—"

"Died?" ejaculated her ladyship, starting as a galvanic thrill of joy swept through her entire frame.

"Yes—she is no more," answered Deveril solemnly. "The shock killed her: but while existence still remained, she revealed a secret—"

"A secret? Ah! what did she reveal? Tell me!"—and Lady Saxondale now surveyed Deveril with breathless suspense.

"She told me," he answered, slowly and solemnly, and fixing upon her ladyship a look of so much commiseration and earnest entreaty, as well as deprecating softness that she was more and more bewildered what to think,— "he told me that he who passes before me world as Lord Saxondale, is not your offspring—but was her own son."

"She told you this?" murmured her ladyship, in a low hoarse voice, as her countenance became deadly white. "And what else said she?"

"That your own son—he who is indebted to you for his being—he who alone has the right to be regarded as our lawful male offspring,—that he still lives—that he carries about with him the proof of his identity—Mother!" cried Deveril, with a sudden gush of uncontrollable feelings, "your son kneels to your feet!"

He sank upon his knees as he thus spoke: and Lady Saxondale, with a wild start, but a subdued shriek, fell back in her chair, a prey to feelings which it could be impossible to describe. The next moment however she exclaimed, "But the proof! the proof!"

"It is here!" answered Deveril, indicating the place where the mark was on his shoulder, close up by his neck. A strawberry—scarcely the size of a pin's head—

"Ah!" ejaculated her ladyship—and a faintness came over her: it seemed as if a tremendous consternation had suddenly fastened itself upon her soul.

"Mother," murmured Deveril, "will you not speak to me as your son?"

"My son!" she exclaimed, springing up from her seat. "What else did the woman tell you?"

"She said no more; she gave naught beyond those simple revealings—yet revealings so astounding to my ears!"

"And she furnished no other proofs? she named no one else?" demanded her ladyship, with impetuous vehemence.

"None! none!" responded Deveril, immensely excited.

"And she is dead?"

"She is dead."

"But who heard those confessions? Speak! tell me everything!"—and there was the swiftness of the hurricane in her ladyship's language, and all its excitement in her manner.

"The Marquis of Eagledean and Angela—she who had until that moment thought herself to be my sister, and was so regarded by me."

"Oh! then," cried Lady Saxondale, with bitterness, "the Marquis—who is my sworn enemy—has sent you hither to demand your rights!"

"By heaven, no!" exclaimed Deveril now springing up from his knees. "Think you that I am capable of exposing you to the world—"

"If you mean to spare me," said Lady Saxondale, "come to my arms, my dearest son!"

Deveril threw himself upon his mother's bosom, and embraced her with all the joyous, gushing, enthusiastic fervour of his noble and affectionate nature. The tears which streamed from his eyes, bedewed her cheeks: and he sobbed audibly, exclaimed in broken sentences, "Oh, my mother! you do not disown me! you do not discard! you acknowledge me! It is all I require!"

"Sit down by me," she said, having the appearance of being deeply affected: "sit down by me—and tell me how you purpose to behave towards me—what you demand—what you expect me to do—"

"I came only to demand of you a parent's recognition of her child," responded Deveril. "You have given it—and I have no more to ask."

"And is it possible," she said, a thrill ecstasie joy once more sweeping through her, and animating her

countenance with such a light that it might well be mistaken by her son for the glow of maternal joy and pleasure in having him at length restored to her, and is it possible that you will consent to remain in obscurity? Is it possible that the Marquis of Eagledean will not urge you to enforce your claims?

"The Marquis of Eagledean is a generous-hearted man," interrupted Deveril; "and he has yielded to my persuasion—he has consented that I shall follow my own inclinations. Oh, my dearest mother! I feel too grateful that you have received me to your arms, to think for a moment of injuring a single hair of your head. No—not for worlds would I do it! It is hard, no doubt, that I should behold another usurping my place: but *that* is preferable to the exposure which must ensue if I assert my claims, and which would involve you in ruin!"

"Do I indeed hear aright?" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, almost wild with joy. "In the same moment that I embrace a son, do I receive from his lips the most affectionate assurances!"

"I call heaven to witness the sincerity of what I say!" cried Deveril. "No, no!—much as my soul may shrink from the bare idea of living privy to an imposture, yet is it better so than to involve you in disgrace. I envy not my supplanter the proud title which he wears and the riches which must be his. My views are modest,—my aspirations humble; I have more than sufficient for my wants—I am to become the husband of a charming creature whom I love—and in all this will my happiness consist. To plunge *you* into disgrace and ruin, in order that I myself should assume a lofty rank and become possessed of vast estates, would only constitute for me a gilded wretchedness, in the midst of which I should pine and languish away. Suffer me sometimes to see you—suffer me occasionally, when the eye of heaven is alone upon us, to embrace you as my mother—and I shall ask no more!"

"Dearest boy!" murmured Lady Saxondale, flinging her arms about his neck; "instead of being grieved at the revelation of that woman's secret I am rejoiced at it, since it has given so dutiful, affectionate, and loving a son to my arms. But are you sure there will not come a moment when you will repent of this forbearance—when you

will long to become possessed of your own?"

"No—never! never!" ejaculated Deveril energetically. "I would not—I could not build up the fabric of my own worldly prosperity upon your ruin and disgrace!"

"Say my death!" added Lady Saxondale emphatically; "for I could not possibly survive exposure. But tell me all the incidents of your past life: tell me everything! You must be aware that I have now the deepest interest in whatsoever concerns you."

Our hero thereupon proceeded to narrate to his mother that history which he detailed to Lady Florina Staunton, and which has been given at greater length in earlier chapters of this narrative. He told her how he had been brought up by the wandering players—how he had been taught to regard them as his parents—and how he had looked upon Angela as his sister. He described how she whom he had believed to be his mother, perished prematurely—how Mr. Deveril took him and Angela to Italy—how he died there—and how on his death-bed he uttered that incomplete sentence which had subsequently led to a search for the manager Thompson. Then he described how the Marquis of Eagledean, under the name of Mr. Gunthorpe, had proved so kind a friend to himself and Angela—how he was engaged to be married to Lady Florina—and how Angela was the betrothed of Francis Paton.

Lady Saxondale listened with the deepest interest; and throughout the narrative she frequently bestowed upon her son caressing indications of commiseration and sympathy. But when he had terminated, not one syllable of explanation did she volunteer on her own side—not a word to clear up those mysteries which Madge Somers had by her death left still unrevealed:—not the slightest detail did she give of the circumstance under which she had procured possession of that woman's child, to pass it off as her own and frustrate the hopes and aims of Ralph Fairfield;—not a whisper did she breathe to account how it was that the supposititious individual should bear upon the neck a mark peculiarly similar to that which her real offspring himself bore. Nor did William Deveril consider it at the moment to be at all strange that Lady Saxondale should thus continue so closely reserved—so extremely guarded, on these points.

his mind was too full of a variety of conflicting emotions to enable him to settle his mental gaze, from the midst of that excitement, on any one particular subject. She had embraced him as her son—she had treated him with sympathy—she lavished upon him the evidences of maternal affection: and he claimed no more at her hands!

"You must leave me now, dearest boy," she at length said: "or those who are in the house, will consider it singular that your visit lasts so long. Come to me again when you choose; and I will always contrive to see you alone, that I may fold you in my arms. But do not write to me on any consideration: letters may miscarry——"

"Mother," interrupted Deveril, "rest assured that I will do nothing to compromise you."

"Dearest boy!" she murmured, as she once more strained him in her arms; and in a few instants he took his departure.

The door closed behind him; and then Lady Saxondale's countenance became suddenly radiant with triumphant satisfaction. But it is necessary that we should afford our readers some little insight into the feelings and the motives which inspired her ladyship throughout the preceding interview, inasmuch as as there was indeed but little sincerity in her demeanour towards him, whom she had thus discovered to be her own real and lawful offspring. When the announcement of this fact was so suddenly made to her, and her son fell upon his knees at her feet, she was stricken with the wildest terror lest the next phase in the startling drama should be the fullest exposure of the tremendous cheat which she had palmed upon society; but in an instant it occurred to her that if her salvation were possible, it could only be by means of a hypocritical cajolery and therefore was it that she strained her son to her bosom. The discourse which ensued was rapid; and each successive sentence spoken by our hero, was full of hope and encouragement for that vile bad woman. She learnt that Madge Somers was dead, and that she had revealed nothing beyond the bare fact of the fraud itself in respect to her own son who passed as Edmund Saxondale, but who was really the supplanter of him who was known to the world as William Deveril. Moreover, her ladyship received the welcome intelligence that the stupendous secret was to be kept—that nothing was to be made

known—that the lips of Angela and the Marquis of Eagledean were sealed—and that William himself preferred his comparative obscurity, to the attainment of rank and riches by the ruin of his mother. It was not therefore difficult for Lady Saxondale to bring herself to lavish carresses upon our hero—to press him to her bosom—to acknowledge him as her offspring—to welcome him as her son—to speak kindly and to look tenderly.

But her heart was in reality unmoved towards him: those maternal yearnings which are so natural on the part of woman and almost so invariable, were in this instance stifled, subdued, and crushed beneath the weight of selfish considerations. Had he proclaimed an intention of demanding his rights and appealing to the tribunals, she would have ignored him as her son—she would have repudiated his claim to be considered her offspring—she would have dared him to the proof; and she would have risked everything in the desperate struggle of one last fight for the maintenance of all that she had committed so many crimes to consolidate. But he had acted otherwise—her conduct was shaped accordingly—and when he went forth from her presence, she felt herself in reality more safe and secure than for many months past she had been. No wonder therefore that a smile of satisfaction and exulting triumph appeared upon her features: for in this brief interview she had comprehended all that was grand, noble, and magnanimous on the part of her son; and she felt confident that whatsoever he had promised he would faithfully perform.

The glance which she threw over her present position was in every way reassuring and comforting for the bad heart of this unscrupulous lady. Madge Somers was dead; and she need trouble herself concerning that woman no longer. Lord Harold Staunton, being irreconcilably at variance with his uncle the Marquis of Eagledean, was altogether dependent upon her—and therefore in her power. She needed not his services to forward her aims; and she could consequently dictate to him her own terms. In this respect her resolution was taken: she would retain him as her paramour: for having become excluded from the society in which she was once wont to

move, she did not intend to stand upon any scruples in the gratification of her passions. Over Edmund her dominion was likewise completely established: the crime which he had committed and the vices to which he was addicted, render him pliant and ductile in her hands. She had no farther fear of the Marquis of Eagledean's animosity on account of past occurrence: her son would prove her friend in that quarter. As to Dr. Ferney, she flattered herself that a little cajolery or the simulation of intensest anguish, would at any time over-ride his scruples and prove more potent than his qualms of conscience. Thus altogether, as she contemplated her present position, Lady Saxondale felt satisfied, elate, and triumphant.

CHAPTER CLXIV.

THE COUNT AND COUNTESS

OF TOLEDO

UPWARDS of eight months had elapsed from the date of those incidents which we have been relating; and it was now the autumn of 1845. A glorious autumn it was too—but nowhere more glowing nor richer in nature's produce of fruits and flowers than in the southern districts of France.

In the neighbourhood of a beautiful little village, on the French side of the Eastern Pyrenees, a delightful cottage residence was situated in the midst of a spacious and well-kept garden. There were likewise pleasure-grounds and shrubberies—an orchard—and a piece of water, on which the swans floated in graceful stateliness. In the stables attached to this dwelling, there were three or four horses; and in the coach house a close carriage and an elegant phaeton. The occupants of this charming villa were a gentleman and lady, two male domestics, and two females. The house and premises had been to let for some time until within about a couple of months of the period of which we are now writing—when they were suddenly taken by the Count and Countess of Toledo, the gentleman and lady already alluded to. They arrived one evening with a couple of attendants—one male and one female—in a postchaise from a northerly direction—it was believed

from Paris; and they halted for a day or two at the village inn. During their walks in the neighbourhood, they perceived the villa residence so charmingly situated in the midst of its grounds; and taking a fancy to the spot, they decided upon settling there, at least for a while. The house was to be let furnished, and belonged to the old notary of the village; a bargain was soon struck—the Count de Toledo needed to give no references, for he had something much better in the shape of a well-filled purse; and hiring the house and premises for a year certain, he paid the entire rent in advance.

It was under auspices which thus seemed particularly favourable in the eyes of the villagers, that the Count and Countess took possession of the cottage. Their domestic establishment was increased by the hire of two more servants—one male and the other female—from the village: and at some adjacent town the Count purchased the horses and carriages. They lived in good style—paid their bills regularly—and were therefore well spoken of throughout the neighbourhood. They were speedily visited by the few good families resident in that district, and thus seemed to have just as much society as could be wanted by persons for whom a somewhat retired and secluded mode of life evidently possessed the greatest charm.

The Count de Toledo was, as his title implies, a Spaniard; and his age appeared to be about seven or eight-and-twenty. He was a fine man—but of features too coarse to be styled actually handsome; and there was a certain roughness in his manner as well as in his appearance, which, though neither positively rude nor uncouth, yet showed a deficiency of that polish which is to be acquired in the drawing-rooms of the fashionable world. But it was understood that he had served in the Spanish army, and for several years had passed his time in camps or barracks, during the civil wars between the Christians and the Carlists. It was therefore supposed that this partial roughness of manner which characterized him, had been derived from his military life; and as his conversation was interesting, varied, and full of anecdotes,—moreover, as he was proficient in all manly sports, was exceedingly hospitable in

his entertainment of the few friends who visited at the cottage, and was liberal in his dealings with the village tradesmen—living also in good style, though in that comparative seclusion, he soon became a favourite with all who knew him. His person, if not handsome, was of a fine manly appearance: his dark hair, singularly luxuriant, curled naturally: his large black eyes were full of fire; and he had a magnificent set of teeth. His form was well set, muscular, and athletic,—powerful without being ungainly. He was a superb horseman, and managed his spirited steed with the utmost skill and expertness. But it was said that he was vain and conceited, inasmuch as he studied a certain affectation in his dress, as if he were fond of the display of a varied and extensive wardrobe,—some of his garments being of those *outré* fashions which at that time had begun to be prevalent in the French capital.

The Countess de Toledo was an English lady, and remarkably handsome. Indeed, not to make any unnecessary mystery upon this point, we may as well at once state that she was an old acquaintance of the readers—being none other than Juliana, Lady Saxondale's elder daughter. After her adventures with the Viscount de Chateaufort, she had precipitately left the Durands' villa, in the manner described in an earlier chapter; and stirring to some remote and obscure French town, had there lived in seclusion, as well as under a feigned name, until the time arrived when she was to become a mother. The child perished at its birth; and when perfectly convalescent, Juliana returned to Paris. She had previously ascertained that her sister and the Marquis of Villebelle, neither of whom she had any inclination to meet, were then dwelling in Naples; and she had also learnt that the Viscount and Countess de Chateaufort were absent on some tour whence they were not expected to return for several months. She was therefore under no apprehension of encountering in the capital any persons whom she would rather not meet: and taking handsome apartments, she looked about her for the purpose of entrapping either a wealthy husband or a paragon.

Juliana had determined not to visit England. She had not a sufficient amount of brazen effrontery to hold her

head erect and look the world in the face where her shame was well known,—as her mother had done. With Lady Saxondale she had occasionally corresponded:—that very letter which she received when the reader was first introduced to her at the Durands' villa, was from her ladyship; and it made her acquainted with the omnipotent sway which Edmund's wife had obtained over him, as well as of the mother's determination to consign him to a madhouse. Subsequent correspondence from the same quarter informed Juliana of Adelaide's death in Lincolnshire: but the young lady did not suspect that it was a foul murder instead of an accident. In her own letters to her mother, she mentioned nothing of her amour with the Viscount de Chateaufort: but she gave due notice of her several changes, of abode—of the death of her child—and of her removal to Paris again. Lady Saxondale liked her daughter too little to be very pressing in her letters that she should return to England: on the contrary, she wrote her approval of Juliana's resolve to remain abroad, and was by no means niggard in remitting funds as often as they were asked for.

It was in Paris, on her return thither after her confinement, that Juliana fell in with the Count de Toledo, who was living in grand style at one of the most fashionable hotels. At first she considered him somewhat repulsive in his looks and uncouth in his manners; and no wonder, when she contrasted him with the delicate beauty of Francis Paton, and the exquisite gentility of the Viscount de Chateaufort. But as their acquaintance improved, the first feelings of aversion rapidly wore off: the fine eyes and splendid teeth of the Count de Toledo were no inconsiderable saving clauses in his favour: he was good-humoured and entertained—liberal and frank-hearted; and Juliana saw that the conquest would be a much more easy one than that of a nobleman or gentleman of a greater drawing-room refinement. Besides, the Count in due course began to pay his addresses with an evidently honourable intention; and a marriage with a Spanish nobleman who seemed possessed of ample wealth, was a chance by no means to be discarded by a young lady in so false a position as Juliana Farefield.

When she perceived that Count de Toledo was serious in his intentions

towards her, she prudently instituted inquiries concerning him. She had in her service a French maid of exceeding shrewdness and quick intelligence; and through her she ascertained that the Count was really, as he had often informed her, a frequent visitor at the house of the Spanish Ambassador in Paris. This was sufficient to guarantee his respectability,—while his mode of life evidently indicated the possession of ample means. On her side, Juliana took good care to let the Spanish nobleman become aware that she was the daughter of Lady Saxondale, and the sister of the bearer of the same proud title: she divised a story of ill-health in England, and the advice of physicians, as the cause for her residing abroad; and she did not forget to mention that her younger sister was married to the Marquis of Villebelle, a Frenchman of high standing and at that time Minister Plenipotentiary at the Court of Naples.

Being thus mutually satisfied with each other, there was nothing to prevent a matrimonial alliance; and as the Count de Toledo was a rigid Catholic, the nuptials were solemnized in a twofold manner—first in a French Church, and immediately afterwards in the chapel of the English Embassy, it had been arranged that after the ceremonies, the Count was to bear his bride into Spain—where they were to take up their abode on his ancestral estates in the Principality of Catalonia. They quitted Paris in a post-chaise—the Countess attended by her maid—the Count by a valet who had been a considerable time in his service. But during the journey southward, they saw in the newspapers that there had been one of those sudden changes of Ministry which were of such frequent occurrence in Spain; and the Count was overwhelmed with affliction. It was some time before Juliana could obtain from him the revelation of the cause of that sorrow which had thus so abruptly seized upon him. At length however, by dint of caresses and entreaties, she gleaned the following explanations:—

He had originally been an officer in the Queen's service; but as his sympathies were always in favour of Don Carlos, he had passed over with a considerable portion of his regiment to that Prince's side. For this action he had been excluded from the amnesty which took place at the termination of the civil war; but he was given to

understand, after a little while, that he might in all safety return to his estates which had not been confiscated. This circumstance of the non-confiscation of his property—together with the secret intelligence forwarded to him that he might go back to his ancestral mansion—was to be ascribed to the fact that he possessed a staunch friend in one of the Ministers then in power,—though this friendship had been unavailingly exercised towards obtaining the inclusion of the Count's name in the amnesty. The Count did return to his estates, where for some period he lived unmolested: he then went to Paris, and fell in with Juliana, whom he married. Several successive Ministries had in the meantime held the reins of power; and no measure was adopted towards his own personal molestation or the seizure of his domains: he had therefore considered himself perfectly secure, and altogether justified in espousing her who had captivated his heart. But now this sudden overthrow of the last Ministry had brought into office his most implacable enemy, at whose hands everything was to be dreaded; and hence the grief with which he was overwhelmed on reading the intelligence in the newspapers.

Such was the narrative of explanations which the Count de Toledo gave Juliana: and she was naturally much chagrined at a circumstance which threatened to render her husband a proscribed exile from his country. Besides, the Count had represented his Catalan mansion and his surrounding estates in such glowing colours, that the bride was naturally desirous to be introduced to the palatial residence and the wide domains of which she had become the mistress; and therefore her disappointment and her affliction were all the more bitter. But there was something consolatory in the statements which her husband, on calmer deliberation, was enabled to make. He fortunately had still a very considerable supply of ready money at his command: he knew also that the intendant of his domains had ample funds in hand, and was a strictly honourable man—so that it would only be needful to communicate with him, in order to obtain the prompt handing over of these immediately available resources. Juliana was thus enabled to take a fairer view of their prospects than at the first glance they seemed to present: and as the journey was

continued southward, she deliberated with her husband upon the course to be adopted. He suggested that they should push on to the very verge of the Pyrenees, and that their honeymoon should be passed in some quiet retreat within the French frontier, whence they might not only watch the progress of affairs in Spain, but the Count might also communicate with his intendant in Catalonia. The proposition was agreeable to Juliana—who, if compelled to remain in France at all, much preferred a comparative seclusion, where there was all the less probability of her husband bearing anything to her disadvantage: for, as the reader may suppose, she had taken good care not to inform him that she had already been the mistress of two paramours, and had likewise been a mother. They reached the little village alluded to in the opening of this chapter: the picturesque cottage, with its attached grounds, at once appeared to them a suitable residence; and as the notary to whom it belonged would not let it for a shorter term than a year, a man of the Count's resources was not likely to hesitate at the arrangement. On the contrary as he expressed himself to Juliana, he would only be too glad to sacrifice some little rent by being enabled to return into Spain and bear his bride to his ancestral home at an earlier period than the term for which they hired the villa-residence.

The Countess of Toledo did not love her husband in the proper meaning of the term: her's was a heart totally unfitted for a pure and virtuous affection. Whatsoever feelings she experienced at all akin to love, was one of the sense and not of the sentiment. It was intertwined with the gross cravings of her temperament; and the attachment which she bore for the Count was precisely the same which in her licentiousness she would have bestowed upon a paramour. Her feeling for Francis Paton had been of the same character—but more furious and frenetic in its devouring regards, because he was the first by whom her sensuousness was gratified. The Viscount de Chateaufort she had loved much less, because her designs in respect to him were based upon a worldly-minded selfishness; and when these were disappointed, she could as readily hate and detest as ever she had liked him. The Count de Toledo was the object of her sensuous regards:

she was also the more pleased with him the better she knew him, on account of his good-nature and the manliness of his spirit, which qualities invariably secure the esteem of every kind and class of women. But on the other hand, he was much attached to her. It is certain that he had espoused her not with the idea that she possessed any pecuniary means of importance; because she had not deceived him on that point: nor indeed, when estimating their immediate resources, had he for a single instant taken into calculation or made the slightest allusion to any funds which she might in case of emergency obtain from her mother. But he liked her for herself alone. She was remarkably handsome;—since her confinement her charms had expanded into a richer exuberance than even that which they before possessed; and being a creature of luxurious temperament, she was well calculated to please the fervid Spaniard. There was some thing, too, in the polish of her manners and the easy elegance of her deportment, which might be supposed to exercise no ordinary influence upon the rougher nature of her husband. She spoke French fluently: this was the language in which they were accustomed to converse; and being intelligent as well as accomplished, Juliana could render her discourse sparkling, winning, or fascinating, according to her purpose or her humour. Moreover, the Count was proud of his handsome English wife; and a husband's pride of the object of his choice is in itself a degree of admiration which cannot be inseparable from love.

The first two months of their residence near the little French village was happy enough: for as we have before observed, they had just sufficient society to prevent the time from hanging heavily on their hands, and for preventing their mode of existence from appearing monotonous. Juliana rode well on horseback; and she liked to accompany her husband amidst the beautiful scenery of the neighbourhood where they dwelt. They drove out too in the phaeton;—and in their close carriage they visited occasionally of an evening the few families with whom they had become acquainted. Juliana had written to her mother to mention her marriage; and Lady Saxondale was but too glad to have thus got rid of a daughter whom for some time past she had ceased to love.

but towards whom she had been compelled to act with a certain degree of apparent kindness, inasmuch as Juliana was acquainted with the secret of the tremendous imposture in respect to Edmund.

It was the month of September when we introduce our reader to the cottage where the Count and Countess of Toledo are now residing. Their somewhat extravagant mode of life—the purchase of horses and carriages—and the sumptuousness of the entertainments which they gave, and which though few, were nevertheless costly in the extreme,—had by this time absorbed the greater portion of the available funds which the Count had brought with him from Paris. One day, he mentioned to his wife that it would be needful to communicate with his intendant; and as no tidings had been received of any overt measure of a hostile character being adopted towards him, either in the form of proclaimed proscription or of property confiscation, he suggested that it would be as well if he were to pay a secret and stealthy visit to his estate in order to transact personally his business with his steward. Juliana was averse to this project, inasmuch as by the mere fact of her husband's proposing to repair with so much precaution to his domain, it was sufficiently evident he feared to be arrested. He however assured her that there was little danger of such a result, as he could rely upon the fidelity of his dependants—but that being liable to hostile proceedings, he of course purposed to adopt the precautions he had named. She herself offered to undertake the journey and see the intendant: but he observed that it would look strange in the village if she were thus to absent herself while he remained at home. Then she proposed that his valet should be entrusted with the mission: but, the Count objected to place so strong a temptation as a considerable sum of money in the man's hands. Thus all her objections and her propositions were overruled; and the Count himself set off on the expedition.

He remained absent for about ten days, during which interval Juliana experienced more or less uneasiness on his behalf. At the expiration of this period he returned home safe, at a late hour one night bringing with him a certain amount of money—but by no means so large as she had

been led to expect. This however he readily accounted for, by stating that the intendant had been compelled to lay out considerable sums on the repairs of the mansion when he first received the intelligence that it was to be gotten in good order for the reception of a mistress. In respect to his own peculiar position in a political sense, it remained unaltered either for the better or the worse: but it was still dangerous for him to think of returning openly to Spain, so long as his enemy continued a member of the Ministry.

It was about this time that Juliana read in one of the French newspapers that the Marquis of Villebelle had been transferred from the Neapolitan Embassy to that of Madrid, thus receiving a promotion in the diplomatic hierarchy. It further appeared that the Marquis and Marchioness, accompanied by their suite, were about to proceed by sea from Naples to Spain, so as to avoid the circuitous route of an overland journey. As the Count frequently assured Juliana that the present Spanish Ministry could not possibly last long—and that as the next one would most probably consist of personages more friendly disposed towards himself, he might expect to be shortly enabled to return openly to his estates,—she began to reflect that as they might possibly visit Madrid, where she would encounter her sister and brother-in-law, it was bad policy on her part to abstain from corresponding with them. She therefore wrote to Constance, acquainting her with her marriage, and highly eulogizing her husband. It happened that the Count was going into the village at the moment when Juliana had finished writing this letter; and he accordingly took it with him to put in the post. Days went by—they grew into weeks—and still no answer was returned. Nevertheless Juliana read in the newspapers that in the interval the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle had arrived in safety at Madrid, and were duly installed in the mansion of the French Embassy in that city. She fancied that her letter must have miscarried: for she thought that Constance was too generous-hearted to cherish any rancour on account of her precipitate flight from the Durands' villa after her affair with the Viscount de Chateanneuf. She accordingly wrote again; and the Count, taking charge of the letter, promised to see that the

postmaster was particular in consigning to the mail bag. Again did days and weeks go past; and still no response came. Then Juliana could arrive at no other conclusion than that her sister was mortally offended with her: and her pride prevented her from penning a third epistle.

Christmas was now drawing near; and again were the Count's funds at a low ebb: again therefore did he resolve upon paying another stealthy visit to his estates in Catalonia on the other side of the Pyrenean boundary. On this second occasion he remained absent for fortnight,—at the expiration of which time he returned safe and sound, and with a considerable sum of money. Juliana was rejoiced at the thought that her husband possessed such an honest attendant; and she more than ever urged to hasten and become the mistress of those estates which produced such ample revenues. It was on the morning after the Count de Toledo's return, that they rode out together in a phaeton. On these occasions they seldom took a domestic with them, as they preferred to be left to their own unrestrained discourse. After making considerable circuit they were returning through the village,—when a sudden ejaculation, as if of surprised cognition, reached their ears. Glancing simultaneously in the direction whence it came, they perceived a wretched-looking man, wrapped in the rags of beggary—but such tatters as he wore, indicating a denizen of the Catalan wilds on the other side of the Pyrenees.

"Ah!" cried the Count de Toledo, "I know the poor man! he is a labourer on my own estate——Or rather, dearest Juliana," he added tenderly, "I ought to say of *our* estate:"—then having made a gesture to the wretched object, as if to imply that he would come to his assistance, the Count gave the reins to his life, requesting her to drive slowly on; and he leapt down from the vehicle.

This little incident occurred on the outskirts of the village, and was unnoticed by any of the inhabitants.

Juliana drove on in a leisurely manner, as she had been directed, and without thinking very much of the occurrence. In a few minutes she was joined by her husband,—who, taking the reins from her hands, drove homeward. While proceeding thither he endeavoured to understand that the

fortunate labourer had wounded a soldier in a disturbance, and had been compelled to fly to the country,—adding that as he (the Count) happened to have but a mere trifle of money about him at the time, he had bidden the poor man await him in the village, whither he purposed to return and give him more substantial assistance. Accordingly on reaching the house, the Count went to the strong-box; and having taken thence what he wanted, hastened back to the village.

A month passed after this incident; and one day, on a tradesman presenting the amount of his bill, the Count de Toledo bade him return in a fortnight, at which time he would be in receipt of ample funds. The man was perfectly satisfied with the assurance, and went away. But Juliana was astonished that her husband should have thus put him off, as she imagined that there must be a considerable remnant of the large sum which he had brought back on his second visit to his Spanish domain. The Count assured her that somehow or another the money had melted away,—adding with a laugh, that he must make another journey across the Pyrenean boundary. As he treated the matter thus lightly, the Countess thought but little more of it—save and except so far as it regarded the necessity for this third separation. The Count however assured her that he incurred little or no risk; and after affectionately embracing her, he mounted his horse and took his departure.

In the evening of that very same day, Juliana was informed by her maid that a person was inquiring for the Count, and would not be satisfied with the assurance of his lordship's absence unless he saw the Countess herself. She, fancying that it might be some particular business which had brought the individual thither, desired that he should be shown into the room where he was seated: but the moment he made his appearance, she at once recognised him as that same wretched looking object who had been relieved a month back. He was not however now clad in the same ragged style, but was very decently apparelled in a suit of broad-cloth, which but ill became his uncouth and ungainly form. He had a dissipated look; and his aspect altogether was little prepossessing. He addressed the Countess in his native Spanish tongue, of which she understood too little to comprehend him: she accordingly desired

that her husband's valet, who was a Spaniard, should be sent for; and the moment the domestic entered the room, a mutual recognition took place between him and the visitor. This was of course natural enough, inasmuch as the latter had been represented as a labourer on the Count's estate, and therefore could scarcely fail of being known to the valet, who had been for some years in his lordship's service. The valet drew the man away from the room, and leading him into the garden, conversed with him there for a considerable time—at the expiration of which he took his departure. Returning to the parlour, the valet informed the Countess that the poor man, relying on his lordship's generosity, had called to solicit some farther assistance, which he (the valet) had given to the extent of his means.

A fortnight elapsed from the date of the Count's departure on this third visit to his estates; and he then reappeared at the cottage: but his left arm was in a sling—he looked pale, ill, and haggard. Juliana was at first much terrified on his account: but he hastened to assure her that though he had sustained a somewhat serious injury, there was nothing to be profoundly alarmed at. A surgeon was at once sent for; and he substituted proper appliances for the clumsy bandages which had in the first instance been tied over the wound. Meantime the Countess had gathered from her husband's lips that he had been attacked by banditti on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees—that he had defended himself successfully against them, until some shepherds who were guarding their flocks, happened to come to his assistance, when the ruffians retreated precipitately. He had however sustained that injury in the arm: but he treated it lightly, inasmuch as he had frustrated the object of the predatory horde, and retained in safety the considerable sum of money which he had brought with him from his intendant. Juliana now told him of the visit which the labourer had paid during his absence—at which the Count at first appeared considerably annoyed: but when he learnt that the Countess was unable to comprehend him, and had transferred him over to the valet for explanations, his lordship became appeased,—treating the matter more lightly, and passing away from the subject with the observation “that the fellow deserved

some blame for imposing upon good nature.”

Several weeks passed: the Count's wound was thoroughly healed—he no longer felt any bad effects from it and as the Spring, which is early in its visits in that genial clime, was now at hand, the rides and drives were regularly resumed amidst the delightful scenery of the neighbourhood. The garden began to put forth its richest floral beauties; and the trees, with their myriads of blossom, gave promise of a luxuriant fruitage. The sun was now powerful for many hours during the day; but the evenings were delicious. Juliana, who had occasionally felt her mode of existence somewhat gloomy and monotonous in the winter time, was now all life and spirits once again: but she was nevertheless more or less impatient at the prolonged delay which was keeping her husband still an exile from his domain. He however was of such unvaried good-nature—so kind and affectionate towards her—so attentive—indeed almost so uxoriously solicitous to anticipate her wants and administer to her enjoyments—that she had really to love him as much as it was possible for such a heart as hers to love at all. She did not regret the brilliant society in which she had been wont to move in her native land ere the exposure of her shame at Saxondale Castle: she cared nothing now for the idle pomp and splendours of fashionable life: but her chief longing was to play the part of a sort of feudal peeress at her husband's mansion in the midst of his wide domains. The Count, comprehending what thus at times was occupying her thoughts, assured her that the present Ministry could not possibly last much longer—that it had already endured for a greater period than could have been anticipated—and that its fall would no doubt prove in its results favourable to the wishes which they both so deeply entertained. Juliana made no reply to her husband's representations: in her heart she feared that he only held out these hopes in order to appease her, but in which he himself was by no means sanguine.

It was one beautiful afternoon at the end of March that Juliana was seated by the open window of the cottage parlour, while her husband was smoking his cigar in the garden. At every turn he passed by the casement, and bent upon her a fond look, at the same time

bestowing some kind word. Having finished his cigar, he approached the house for the purpose of entering—but again lingered in front of the window to make some passing remark. By one of those movements which have no particular meaning, he took off his hat as he stood near the casement; and so powerful was the glow of the sun that it made his hair, which was of a dark colour, seem absolutely light in the golden beams which poured their effulgence upon his head. Juliana was just on the point of admonishing him not to expose himself too much to the fervid heat of the unclouded sun,—when she noticed that he dropped his hat with a sudden start, and as if all in an instant thrown into some degree of excitement or confusion. But as quickly recovering his self-possession, he said to his wife, "I will rejoin you, dearest, in a few moments;"—and then hastened away towards the farther extremity of the garden.

Juliana thought there was something singular in this proceeding; and she at once issued from the cottage. On emerging into the garden, she beheld her husband and that individual as they passed slowly along in the orchard. She saw them stop short, and both gesticulated violently; so that she now wondered that the man should have the impertinence to assume so threatening an attitude in the presence of the Count. A suspicion that there was something more in the repeated visits of this person than she had hitherto been led to believe, entered her mind; and this gave rise to other reflections, which were by no means calculated to relieve her from anxiety.

Still she kept her eyes fixed upon her husband and his companion: but as she suddenly beheld them separate—the man remaining where he was, and the Count retracing his way rapidly towards the dwelling—she sped back thither before he had an opportunity of seeing that she had issued forth at all. Resuming her seat in the parlour, she awaited the Count's entrance,—composing her features as well as she was able, and wondering whether he would tell her what had taken place. He entered the cottage in a few minutes; but instead of rejoining her in the parlour, went straight up to the bed chamber where the cash-box was kept. She at once surmised that it was to procure fresh means of relief for the man who thus appeared to

have such strong claims on her husband's bounty. He did not remain many moments upstairs; and on descending, just looked into the parlour to inform his wife that he would be with her in a few minutes. He then sailed forth again; and Juliana, haunted by suspicions which grew stronger and stronger, though they were still utterly vague and indefinite, hastened up to the bed-room. The Count, in his hurry, had forgotten to lock the strong-box, of which he was invariably accustomed to keep the key; and as Juliana happened at this time to know exactly what amount there ought to be in the casket, she was speedily enabled to estimate how much had just been taken thence. To her surprise and annoyance, as well as with a still strengthening suspicion, she discovered that a very formidable inroad indeed had been made upon their pecuniary resources, so that there was scarcely sufficient left to meet the tradesmen's bills that would be coming in at the end of the week. She descended again to the parlour,—sadly troubled, but still utterly at a loss to conceive how it was possible that a mere labourer on her husband's estate could have obtained such a hold on his lordship as thus to extort from him so large a pecuniary succour. She now felt assured that on the occasion when the contents of the cash-box had so mysteriously diminished, necessitating at the time a repetition of the Count's visit to his intendant,—the assistance he had afforded the poor man must have been to a far greater amount than he had represented, and that thereby the exhaustion of their funds was to be accounted for. All these things agitated, bewildered, and perplexed the mind of Juliana: but in the midst of her troubled reflections, the Count entered the room. He at once, with his wonted frankness, informed her that the man who was succoured on previous occasions, had called again to implore farther bounties.

"As you may easily suppose," his lordship went on to say, "I was little gratified by this renewal of his importunities; but as he solemnly assured me that he had now a chance of benefiting himself permanently, if he had only a sum of ready money, I agreed to help him for the last time."

"And to what amount did you thus assist him?" inquired Juliana, not suffering her husband to perceive that the incident had at all troubled her.

"I am afraid I have been rather foolish," responded the nobleman, with a good-natured laugh; "for I have given the fellow a sum sufficient to make a gentleman of him."

"But how is it possible," asked Juliana still with a perfectly ingenuous air, "that a poor labouring man should need such ample supplies—and that you should consent thus to minister to his wanton extravagances?"

It struck Juliana that the Count eyed her strangely for a moment—with a keenness as if to penetrate into the depths of her soul, and ascertain whether she had any deeper motive than mere passing curiosity for putting these questions. She maintained her countenance perfectly: the reader knows she was a perfect mistress of dissimulation; and she did not choose to let her husband perceive that she had been smitten with any disagreeable impression; for if so, he would at once suspect that she had watched his movements. Therefore, when he saw nothing in her features to betray what was passing in her mind, he suddenly desisted from that keenness of gaze,—and observed in his wonted off-hand frank way, "The fellow belongs to a family that has been long located on my domain. Since he has been in France, he has fallen, I fear, into bad company: but he is now repentant, and purposes to lead a steady life. So I have given him this last chance—and at all events have bade him come into my presence no more."

The discourse was then turned into another channel; and Juliana knew not what to think. She could not altogether banish the disagreeable impression made upon her mind, nor the vague suspicions that something was wrong, which had been excited in her bosom: but still her husband's explanations had been given with a frankness which seemed perfectly sincere; and so far as she could perceive, he had not practised any deception towards her. But a circumstance which she had foreseen now happened in the course of a day or two: this was that the Count informed her of his intention to undertake another journey across the Pyrenees.

"This time," she at once said, "you must permit me to accompany you? If there be dangers, I will share them."

"And it is for this very reason, dearest, that you must not accompany me," was his immediate response,

accompanied by caressing manifestations of affection.

"I beseech you," persisted Juliana, "to let me go with you on the present occasion. Besides, I long to see the place which sooner or later will be our home. I have hitherto concealed, if not altogether subdued, my impatience——"

"And you must continue to do so for a short space longer," interrupted her husband. "You cannot accompany me now, my dearest wife: it would perhaps seriously compromise my safety. I expect to receive some tidings of a nature favourable to our hopes, and trust that in very short time there will no longer be any necessity for stealthy visits to my ancestral home."

"Promise me, then—promise me faithfully," said Juliana, "that if circumstances should compel you to pay another stealthy visit, after this one to your estates, you will suffer me to accompany you."

"I promise faithfully," responded her husband: and having embraced her, he once again took his departure on horse back—but unattended and alone.

CHAPTER CLXV

THE MEETING

For the first few days after the had thus separated, Juliana continued much troubled in her mind. Sometimes she was dull and desponding—haunted by vague suspicions—a prey to indefinite fears: at other times she was excited, impatient, and angry—thinking that she had not acted with proper spirit in forbearing from questioning her husband farther relative to the man whose frequent extortion compelled him to visit his intendant oftener than he otherwise would have done. And now, too, she began to reflect that these repeated absences might have been very well avoided, the intendant himself came periodically across the Pyrenean boundary, bring the requisite supplies—which course, indeed, seemed much more natural on the part of that functionary rather than suffer his master to endanger his own safety by running after him. She wondered that this had not struck her before. Suspicion terribly prolific: it engenders a thousand;—and such was the case in the present instance. Juliana began to calculate that though they lived well, and even handsomely, yet the

expenditure must be wretchedly insignificant in comparison with the lordly revenues produced by her husband's estates: that is to say, if they were of the magnitude which he had represented. The thought would steal into her head that in some way or another she had been deceived: but this was an idea too frightful to harbour willingly. She endeavoured to banish it altogether; but she could not. In her attempt to escape from it, she sought excitement in other ways. She paid a round of visits—she invited guests to the cottage—she rode out frequently—she took long walks. Still that idea haunted her. Yet, how could she have been deceived? Not in respect to her husband's rank and station: for had not her maid ascertained in Paris that he was all he had represented himself? But perhaps it was in the extent of his pecuniary resources that he had misled her: or perhaps his estates were really confiscated, and he had not liked to reveal the distressing truth—so that the resources which he represented as coming from his intendant, might be in reality furnished by the purse of private friendship? At all events she resolved to lead him into the fullest explanations on his return: for now that her suspicions were once excited, she could not possibly endure a state of uncertainty and suspense.

A week had elapsed from the date of the Count de Toledo's departure on this last occasion,—when one day, as Juliana was riding in the phaeton through the village, the groom driving her, she was struck with astonishment on beholding M. Durand standing at the door of the inn. She liked this encounter as little as possible; inasmuch as the Durands knew full well, when she was staying at their villa at Auteuil, that she was in a way to become a mother; and they were likewise perfectly cognizant of her amour with the Viscount de Chateaufneuf. If a word were breathed in the village of those circumstances, her reputation would be ruined—the tale would inevitably reach her husband's ears—and she would be dishonoured in his eyes. M. Durand had at once recognised her, so that she was compelled to order the phaeton to stop. Hastily alighting, she ran forward as if to welcome him with enthusiasm—but in reality to prevent him from addressing her by the name of Madame Chesterfield (as she had been called at the villa) in the presence of the groom. She took him by the

hand; and inquired with much seeming friendship after his wife: M. Durand led her into a parlour in the hostelry; and there she found Madame Durand herself. It appeared that a brother of the old gentleman's had recently died at Barcelona; and as he had no child M. Durand was his heir. He had been established for a long series of years as a merchant in the Catalan capital, and had amassed a considerable fortune. On the strength of this rich heritage, Monsieur and Madame Durand were travelling post from Paris, and had diverged several miles from their more direct route, in order to pay a flying visit to some distant relations who dwelt in those parts. On their name being mentioned, Juliana discovered—much to her apprehension and annoyance—that they were one of the families whom she was accustomed to visit.

She now had to give explanations on her own side; and these were to a certain extent humiliating enough. She was obliged to confess that the name of Chesterfield was a feigned one—that the story of a husband in India was altogether an invention—that she had never been married at the time she was at the Durands' villa—and that she was in reality the daughter of an English peeress named Saxondale. She went on to inform the Durands that she was now married to the Count de Toledo, a Spanish nobleman who for political reasons was unable to enter Spain; and that for some time past they had resided in the neighbourhood of that village. She begged and implored Monsieur and Madame Durand to save her reputation; and as we have before stated that this worthy couple were by no means over nice in their notions of female morality, they readily promised to follow her injunctions. She lavished upon them all possible proofs of gratitude and friendship; and insisted that they should dine with her: but they had just partaken of luncheon at the hotel, and they were in haste to continue their journey. Indeed, their post-chaise was now in readiness; and they took their leave of the Countess de Toledo, to pursue their way,—their purpose being to enter Spain by way of Perpignan at the eastern extremity of the Pyrenees.

Juliana was much relieved when she saw them take their departure: but she now more than ever longed to quit France altogether, and fix her abode

on her husband's domain; for she calculated that in the depths of Catalonia there was far less chance of incurring such disagreeable encounters as this one, than on the northern side of the Pyrenees. She therefore looked anxiously forward for the Count's return, not merely that she might have the fullest explanations with him on the various points which troubled her—but likewise because he had given her to understand he expected some favourable intelligence with regard to his own political position, on the occasion of this visit into Spain. Ten days more passed. The Count had been absent above a fortnight; and his prolonged absence rendered Juliana more and more uneasy and restless. But now another incident occurred which requires special mention.

It was late one evening—just as Juliana was about to retire for the night—that the sounds of an equipage dashing rapidly along the main road, which skirted the front of the garden, reached her ears. There was in this nothing extraordinary, inasmuch as it was one of the routes from Perpignan to Paris; and therefore the passage of vehicles was by no means unfrequent. But scarcely had this equipage reached the border of the grounds attached to the cottage, when a tremendous crash was heard by all the inmates of the dwelling. They rushed forth: the horses were plunging—the postilions were shouting and swearing—and the vehicle itself, which was a handsome travelling-carriage, lay upset in the middle of the road. A valet and lady's-maid who had been riding in the rumble behind, were precipitated from their places: fortunately, however, they had fallen upon a bank of long grass by the road side, and were therefore little hurt. But what was the astonishment—and for a moment what the dismay of Juliana—when, as she hurried forth from the cottage with her domestics, to render assistance, she recognised in that lady's-maid the faithful Mary-Anne, the dependant of her sister Constance.

It was a beautiful night; and the heavens were studded with stars. Scarcely therefore had Juliana reached the garden-gate, when she made this recognition, as the valet—a smart Frenchman—was supporting Mary Anne in his arms, and questioning her in broken English, as well as with much anxiety of mind, whether she were hurt.

A glance from the lady's maid to the carriage showed Juliana the form of the Marquis of Villebelle, who had just emerged from the upset vehicle, and was drawing Constance forth. Juliana hastened to make hers. If known to the Marquis; and the next moment she was clasped fondly and fervently in the arm of her sister Constance, who had escaped without the slightest injury from the accident. As infinite as was the joy, so great was evidently the astonishment likewise of Constance in thus encountering her sister; and a rapid interchange of observations made the Marquis and Marchioness aware, on the one hand that Juliana was married to the Count de Toledo—and informed Juliana herself, on the other hand, that the letter she had written to her sister had never reached their destination.

One of the axle-trees of the carriage was broken; and though it might be sufficiently repaired with a cord and bar of wood, to enable the horses to draw it into the village, the vehicle was totally unfit for the reception of the traveller. Juliana therefore begged that the Marquis and her sister would take their quarters at the cottage; and the invitation was gladly accepted by the fond and kind-hearted Constance—while the Marquis had no objection to offer for the intelligence that his sister-in-law was now a married woman, naturally led him to believe and hope that she was at length respectably settled in life. We should here observe that when Mary Anne perceived a lady faded in the arms of the Marchioness, and in the lady quickly recognised Juliana, she was herself seized with astonishment. Juliana lost no time in saying something kind to her sister's faithful dependant, who was still more surprised on being informed of the lady's marriage. The whole scene was therefore one of considerable excitement, and of no mean interest to several of the persons who figured in it.

The Marquis directed that the valet and the maid should follow the carriage to the village-man, and take up their quarters there: for a glance at the cottage, showed him that its dimensions would not afford accommodation for too large a company. He and the Marchioness then followed Juliana into the dwelling; and while the table was being spread with materials for supper, the two sisters again embraced each other. Indeed Constance was overjoyed at this unexpected

but most welcome meeting with one on whose account she had suffered much anxiety for a long time past; and infinite was her pleasure to learn that Juliana had made a match of which she spoke with so much pride and satisfaction. But where was her husband? In the first excitement of the encounter, Juliana had forgotten to inform her sister and brother-in-law that the Count de Toledo was absent on a visit to his estates in Catalonia. One explanation led on to another; and Juliana gave a description of the political position of her husband. The Marquis of Villebelle listened with something more than attention: his countenance gradually wore a singular aspect; and in an involuntary manner, he exclaimed, "It is remarkable that, much as I know of Spain and Spanish affairs, I never heard till now, Juliana, of the nobleman whom you have exposed."

Juliana gazed with an uncontrollable sensation of affright and horrified dismay upon her brother-in-law, as he gave utterance to those words. All her suspicions—hitherto so vague and indefinite—flamed up again in her mind, but with a brighter intelligence: so that she was smitten with the awful thought that, after all, her husband was an impostor. Constance caught her by the hand,—exclaiming, "Juliana dearest, what in heaven's name is the matter? I am sure Etienne did not purpose to wound your feelings."

"Far—very far from it," said the Marquis quickly. "It is not a reason that there should be no such nobleman, because I have never heard of him. I may have even heard of him—and yet have forgotten it. My words were inconsiderate and unguarded. Titles are most plentiful in Spain; and it is impossible for any one man's head to retain the recollection of them all. Pray pardon me, Juliana!"

"Say no more upon the subject," interrupted his sister-in-law, considerably relieved by all that he had just said, and angry with herself that she should so suddenly have yielded to those wild fears and terrific apprehensions.

"I have an adventure to relate to you, Juliana," said Constance, thus seeking to turn the conversation into another channel. "Yes—it was an adventure quite romantic in its way. I

can assure you—though by no means agreeable for many reasons. The fright and the loss——"

"What, then, was this adventure?" inquired Juliana, whose interest and curiosity were now excited by her sister's words.

"An adventure with banditti," resumed Constance. "It happened yesterday, in the broad daylight. We were travelling through the north-eastern part of Catalonia, and in a wild desolate district,—when all of a sudden the carriage was surrounded by at least a dozen men, armed to the teeth.

"Heavens, what an adventure!" ejaculated Juliana, shuddering with affright.

"But I can assure you," said the Marquis, "that your sister bore herself with the utmost fortitude. As you may suppose resistance was entirely vain, as it would also have been perilous against such a horde of desperadoes. The consequence was that as they experienced no opposition, they behaved courteously enough."

"You have forgotten one little circumstance, dear Etienne," said Constance; "and you are not exactly representing the facts as they positively occurred. For, the moment the carriage was stopped, you seized your pistols, and gave the men to understand that you would use them. But I besought you not to endanger your life thus madly——"

"And I was compelled to submit," added the Marquis, smiling. "Well, perhaps it was all for the best: for, as I have said, resistance would indeed have proved utterly vain. The captain of the band—who was certainly the most decent fellow for a bandit that ever figured otherwise than on a stage in a melodrama—came up to the carriage-window, and in very excellent French assured us that not the slightest violence should be offered us if we only remained quiet. He even went so far as to say that our articles of jewellery should be left us, and that our domestics should not be despoiled at all, if we only gave up whatsoever ready money we had in our possession. Now, it unfortunately happened that there was a casket in the carriage containing about twenty thousand francs in gold and silver——"

"Eight hundred pounds sterling," observed Constance, "and the whole of this sum did the brigands self-appropriate,—leaving us however the little we happened to have in our

purses, and faithfully fulfilling their pledge in respect to our jewellery, as well as the property of the servants. They did not even ransack our trunks and boxes—but appeared perfectly well content with the rich booty in the shape of specie that fell into their hands.”

“And well they might be!” ejaculated the Marquis. “But I rather think that their great forbearance was not altogether owing to good feeling on their part—but may be also ascribed to terror lest one of the flying columns which the Captain General of Catalonia has sent out to sweep the Principality of the banditti who infest it, should have suddenly appeared upon the spot. Hence the expeditious mode with which the scoundrels transacted their business. They decamped with their booty; and when we reached the next village, we were informed that there was little doubt our plunderers were a gang which for some years have carried on their proceedings with comparative impunity, and seem to defy all the vigilance of the authorities. Their commander is known as Ramon de Collantes: and though an immense sum is set upon his head, yet his comrades are evidently too faithful to betray him.”

“This was indeed a romantic but a frightful adventure!” exclaimed Juliana; “and I congratulate you both upon having passed through it on terms so comparatively cheap.”

The conversation was continued until a late hour,—when the Marquis and Constance were conducted to the chamber prepared for their reception; and Juliana retired to her own. She could not however immediately close her eyes in sleep: the remarks which had fallen from the lips of her brother-in-law in respect to her husband, continued to haunt her; and though she endeavoured to tranquillize herself with a review of the observations which we had subsequently made to qualify the effect of the first, she could not shake off a certain uneasy feeling. When slumber at length visited her that feeling still pursued her and raised up all kinds of images of terror to people her dreams. The night which she thus passed was restless, troubled, and disturbed; and when she awoke in the morning, it was with an aching head and careworn looks.

The Marquis of Villebelle rose at a somewhat early hour, and descended

to walk in the garden before breakfast. Juliana saw him from the window of her own bed-chamber, thus sauntering along the gravel-walks and amusing himself with the contemplation of the floral beauties profusely scattered about. She caught herself sighing as she envied the lot of her sister, who was married to a nobleman that lay under no political ban—who in a very short time he pushed himself up by his own merits and talents, from complete obscurity to high diplomatic position—and whose personal appearance was infinite superior to that of her own husband the Count de Toledo.

While she was thus giving way to her reflections, and performing her toilet, she heard the sounds of a horse's hoofs approaching along the road; and again hastening to the window, she in a few moments perceived that it was her husband. She waved her kerchief in token of welcome; and he answered the salutation in a similar manner. At that instant she caught sight of Villebelle, who was in the front garden; and she noticed the hurried rapid glances from the horseman who had stopped at the gate, up the window where she was thus waving her kerchief. Then the Marquis advanced hurriedly towards that gate, just as the Count de Toledo alighted; and it struck Juliana, as well as she could judge from the distance of about twenty yards, that there was a startling recognition between her brother-in-law and her husband. Was it possible they had met before, at that the Marquis could have forgotten the Count's name? or had the Count borne some other denomination when they had thus previously encountered each other? Juliana remained at the window gazing forth, the Marquis and her husband stood conversing for a few moments, and while the groom hastened forth to take charge of the horse, they walked away together along one of the shady avenues in the garden. Assuredly thought Juliana to herself, they must have met before; and now they were probably conversing on past occurrences familiar to them both. But she nevertheless considered it strange and unlikely that her husband did not at once come up to embrace her.

In a few more minutes the Marquis and the Count emerged from the shady avenue, and approached the cottage. They entered together, and Juliana heard them both ascend the

stairs: the Marquis passed into the chamber which himself and Constance had occupied,—the Count entering that where Juliana was dressing. He clasped her in his arms, and seemed more fervid than ever in the caresses which he bestowed upon her. When these endearments were over, and she had leisure to contemplate him, she was struck with his pallid and careworn looks; but he hastened to assure her that he had ridden throughout the whole of the past night in order to rejoin her again as soon as possible. Then he renewed his caresses, and appeared so happy in their reunion that she could not at once begin to question him on those various points concerning which she had made up her mind to solicit the most candid as well as the completest explanations.

"And so accident has thrown your brother-in-law and sister in your way?" said the Count. "The Marquis and I have met before. It was some time back—in my father's life time—and ere I succeeded to my title."

This explanation, given in her husband's wonted off-hand manner, produced an indescribable relief in Juliana's mind. She saw at once that he was all he had represented himself to be: or else Villebelle could not ere now have recognised him as such;—for that he had done so, she naturally inferred from the fact of their walking and conversing together; and moreover her husband would not give her an assurance which the Marquis could presently disprove.

"By the bye," continued the Count, "your brother-in-law has been telling me of this adventure in Catalonia——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Juliana, as a recollection struck her: "perhaps it was the terrible Ramon de Collantes and his formidable band who waylaid you on that occasion when you were wounded?"

"Very probable," answered the Count. "But hasten and finish your toilet, dearest Juliana: for the Marquis and Marchioness purpose to take their leave immediately after breakfast. I myself—to speak candidly—am so exhausted with my night's travel, that I shall lie down and take a little repose. If I see not his lordship again ere his departure, pray make my best excuses."

Juliana descended to the parlour where the breakfast-table was spread, and where she found the Marquis and Marchioness awaiting her presence,

Constance at once threw herself into her sister's arms; and Juliana was for a moment surprised at the effusion of grief which convulsed the Marchioness. She wept and sobbed bitterly; but Juliana thought to herself that it was quite a natural outpouring of Constance's affectionate disposition at the idea of so speedy a separation after being so brief a space together. Presently the Marchioness grew more composed: but she looked very pale; and even ill—and seemed much desponding. The Marquis himself had a certain air of restraint which he endeavoured to shake off; but he could not. Juliana's keen glance and wide experience of human nature convinced her that there was something on his mind; and now she likewise coupled the grief of Constance with this suspicion. She herself grew restless and uneasy: and there was a sort of vague terror hanging upon her soul.

"You knew my husband before?" she said to the Marquis: and the very words she thus uttered, seemed to her imagination to connect themselves with all the undefined apprehensions that were uppermost in her thoughts.

"Yes: we have met before," responded the Marquis.

"And he was not then the Count of Toledo?" said Juliana.

"He was not then the Count of Toledo," answered the Marquis, repeating her words in a manner which struck her as still more singular than even his constrained air had previously done.

"There is something strange about you, Etienne!" she exclaimed, unable to control her feelings; "and something strange about you likewise, Constance!"

"Constance," the Marquis hastened to observe, "is afflicted at the idea of parting from you so soon."

Juliana gazed very hard at her sister to see if the looks of the latter corroborated this assertion; and the Marchioness murmured, "Yes, dearest Juliana, believe me—Oh, believe me! it well nigh breaks my heart to separate from you thus."

"My husband," Juliana went on to observe, "regrets that excessive fatigue should have so absolutely prostrated him as to prevent him doing the honours of the breakfast-table:"—but as she thus delivered herself of the excuse with which she had been charged, it struck her that the very

apology itself was insufficient to account for the absence of the Count from his proper place when hospitality was to be shown to those who had become connected with him by marriage; for she now thought that he might have borne up at least another hour against his sense of weariness, however excessive it might be.

"Now, dearest Constance," said the Marquis, "hasten and get ready to depart. The carriage is doubtless repaired by this time; and we must pursue our journey towards Paris without delay."

"But, Ah!" ejaculated Juliana, as a sudden recollection struck her: "you are without funds—you were plundered of them. Doubtless the Count has ample resources with him: I will procure you a supply——"

Constance hurried from the room: but ere the door closed behind her, Juliana's ear caught a half-smothered convulsing sob; while the Marquis expressing his thanks for the proposal she had just made, went on to observe, "It is not necessary to avail ourselves of your kindness; for at the first large town which we reach, any banker there will cash my draft upon Paris."

"Now, tell me, Etienne," said Juliana, looking earnestly in her brother-in-law's countenance! "is there anything weighing upon my sister's mind, and weighing upon your's also? But Ah! methinks I understand," she ejaculated, with a sudden access of bitterness in her tone, as a thought smote her brain. "You know my husband to be a man of the highest honour and the strictest probity—you know likewise that in becoming his wife, I must have deceived him in respect to my own antecedents: you have recognised in him a friend of former times—and you feel shocked that he should have been thus deceived! Oh, do not deny it! I now comprehend it all! And my sister—she trembles lest the Count should discover my past frailties, and that he should wreak upon me a terrible Spanish vengeance. Tell me, is it not so?"

"Juliana," responded Villebelle, addressing her in a solemn tone; "it is painful—most painful thus to refer to the past. I beseech you to dwell no longer upon it. But one word more ere we separate. If, Juliana, you should ever require the succour or the consolation of friends, rest assured that you will not apply in vain to your sister or myself.

Unfortunately your husband is *in* proscribed——"

"Ah!—and his estates are all confiscated?" ejaculated Juliana. "I feared so for some time past: through kindness he has forborne from revealing the sad, sad truth!"

"Believe me, Juliana," continued Marquis, gravely and earnestly, "your husband is proscribed beyond all hope of ever having the ban lifted from his head. Every time that he crosses Pyrenean frontier he risks his life. I am compelled to speak plainly: he incurs the chance of being shot manfully, or dragged ignominiously to the scaffold's platform!"

"Good heavens!" cried Juliana, clasping her hands in despair: "his persecutors so rancorous? I she ejaculated, catching at the slightest gleam of hope, "may not a change of Ministry——"

"No change of Ministry can be of avail to him," responded Villebelle. "It is my duty, painful though it be, to assure that he is proscribed beyond redemption. He has solemnly promised me, during the few minutes we are now conversing together, that he will remain altogether in France. If you wish to preserve your husband to yourself, you will add weight of your influence to induce him to keep this pledge. I understand has brought ample funds away with him from Catalonia on this occasion——"

"Doubtless from a friendly source," ejaculated Juliana inquiringly.

"Yes: from a source where no imbursement never will be demanded," responded Villebelle. "But let us leave this neighbourhood. While on Pyrenean frontier, there will ever be temptation to induce him to cross. Urge him, Juliana, to remove far into the interior of France: tell him that for the sake of his life you voluntarily and cheerfully renounce every hope of accompanying him to Spain; and persuade him to turn his attention to some pursuit by which he may earn his livelihood in this country. Do you promise me to follow this advice? Do you pledge yourself to make sacrifice for the sake of him who has been proscribed?"

"In his position, then, really hopeless?" inquired Juliana, with sickening sensation at the heart, as her fine dreams of enacting the fate of a peeress in a castellated mansion of the Catalan domain, seemed to dissipate.

like the mists of morning when the sun is up.

"It is hopeless!" answered Villebelle. "Painful—nay, even more—torturing to me though it is, to be thus compelled to speak such truths, every one of which must penetrate like a dagger into your heart, it is nevertheless my duty as your brother-in-law, and for your sister's sake, to speak thus openly. Now, fail not, Juliana, to follow the counsel which I so disinterestedly give you!"

"I will, Etienne," she answered—but it was almost in a dying tone: for though now utterly relieved from her first apprehensions that she had married an impostor, she yet had the frightful conviction forced upon her that her husband was a proscribed outlaw, and a pauper dependent upon the bounties of friendship.

At this moment the Marchioness of Villebelle returned to the room; and the Marquis hastened to say to her, "Constance dearest. I have told Juliana all that it was agreed between you and me that I should tell her. She has faithfully pledged herself to follow my advice; and I therefore conjure you to control your own feelings as much as possible, so that the parting moments need not be necessarily embittered."

Constance did her best to obey her beloved husband's injunctions; but she could not altogether subdue her emotions; and it was amidst bitterest tears and sobs that she murmured the last farewell.

"Remember, Juliana!" said the Marquis, with a significant look, as he pressed his sister-in-law's hand: and he then hastily conducted his wife out of the cottage.

CHAPTER CLXVI

THE FLIGHT.

JULIANA was now alone in the parlour, whence her brother-in-law and sister had just issued forth; and most lonely indeed did she feel. Her heart experienced a desolation such as it had scarcely ever known before,—no, not even when her exposure was effected by Mr. Hawkshaw at Saxondale Castle—nor again when she beheld all her cunningly devised plans in respect to the Viscount de Chateaufort shattered to pieces. It was true,

she thought to herself, that she had not married an impostor in rank: but she had espoused a beggar with regard to purse—and her prospects seemed gloomy indeed.

Suddenly she bethought herself that she had not ascertained from her husband how much money he had on this occasion brought back with him from Spain; and she ascended for this purpose to the chamber where he had lain down to rest. She was in one of those moods when it was little likely she would trouble herself about disturbing him in the midst of slumber; and she entered abruptly, without any precaution. He was not asleep; and rising up, sat on the bed, surveying her for a few moments with a peculiar look. He at once saw that there was a considerable change in her manner towards him; and for an instant an expression of uneasiness flitted over his features: but quickly composing them again, he said, "Have they taken their departure?"

"They have," responded Juliana. "Will you have the goodness to inform me what amount you have brought with you from the other side of the Pyrenees?—for methinks that therein consists our entire fortune."

"I have some twenty-five thousand francs," replied the Count de Toledo—the sum which he thus specified, being a thousand pounds in English money.

"And when that sum is gone, how are we to live?" asked Juliana. "Of course you cannot fail to understand that I now know everything—that your estates are confiscated—that your position is hopeless—and that you must never again think of revisiting your native land. Indeed, I fear that so far from having received any supplies at the hands of your intendant, you must be largely indebted to the bounty of your friends; and I do not see how you will ever acquit yourself of these liabilities."

Juliana spoke in a cold manner, but yet with a certain degree of bitterness in her accents; while her husband listened with silent attention until she had finished, and his eyes were fixed keenly and searchingly upon her.

"If my estates be in reality all confiscated," he observed, "you do not, I presume, intend to make the circumstance a subject of reproach?"

"To speak frankly," answered Juliana, "I do not think you acted well

by concealing from me, when you offered marriage, the real position in which you were placed in respect to your Government, and the possibility—nay, more—the probability of your estates being confiscated by the advent of a hostile Ministry to power. You should have dealt candidly with me——”

“And pray, Juliana,” interrupted the Count de Toledo, his features assuming a sudden expression of mingled fierceness and hardihood, “did you deal with the fullest frankness towards me?”

“What mean you?” ejaculated the lady, seized with trepidation as all her antecedents swept through her mind.

“I mean,” rejoined her husband, “that when you informed me you were Lady Saxondale’s daughter—that your brother was Lord Saxondale—that your sister had married Villebelle the eminent diplomatist, you forgot to add certain little incidents in respect to yourself.

“Ah!” murmured Juliana, becoming pale as death: but with a desperate effort to regain her effrontery, she said in a haughty tone, “If calumniating tongues have made themselves busy with my name,—you, as my husband, ought to defend me, instead of having, even for a single moment, the appearance of attaching credibility to the whisperings of scandal.”

“I am afraid, Juliana,” answered the Count de Toledo, “that it would be rather a difficult thing to convince the Durands that you did not live with them under the name of Madame Chesterfield—that you were not in a way to become a mother when residing beneath their roof—and that you did not, even then and there, intrigue with the Viscount de Chateaufort.”

Juliana sank down upon a seat, like one annihilated. It was utterly impossible to deny facts which had evidently come with all corroborative details to her husband’s knowledge. At that instant she hated him: she felt that whatsoever degree of affection—or rather of liking towards him, which his own love had engendered in her mind, was now completely destroyed: for the instant that he became an accuser, she viewed him in the right of an enemy.

“Now Juliana, you perceive,” he said, addressing her in a milder and more soothing voice, “that if there

were any deficiency of candour on my side, there was far more on yours. Whatsoever concealment was practised by me was the veriest trifle, in comparison to that adopted by you. But do not intend to give utterance to reproaches: I should not have made the allusions at all, were it not to convince you that you had no right to upbraid me.

“And have you all along been acquainted with those circumstances inquired Juliana, still covered with shame and confusion.

“No,” responded the Count. “But let me tell you that at the very first, when our acquaintance began, I suspect there was something peculiar attached to your history. A young lady, unmarried, living apart from her family——But, matter! it is useless to dwell upon details. Suffice it to say that I never knew the whole truth until the other day, when I met the Durands in Spain.”

“Ah! you met them?” ejaculated Juliana. “They told you that they saw me in the village—they revealed everything——vile gossips, treacherous scoundrels that they are!”—and her countenance was flushed with indignation and rage.

“You would indeed do well never to speak to them again, if you should happen to encounter them,” observed her husband quickly. “And now, Juliana, more in respect to the past!—there shall be no upbraidings on either side. Whatever you may have been, I love you: you know that I love you—and that is sufficient!”

It was *not* however sufficient for Juliana. As we have already said, her own liking towards the Count had suddenly been altered into a sentiment very much resembling hatred. She felt that he had deceived her in respect to his true position; and for this she experienced rancour against him. But in order to silence her upbraidings, he had suddenly taken the far higher ground of an accuser: he had conquered—he had subdued her: she had been humiliated in his presence—she had not even the satisfaction of giving an additional vent to her own feelings of animosity against him. Her pride was in every way humbled;—and such a position was not at all a pleasurable one for the Countess de Toledo. Moreover, she could not help fancying that she was not as yet fully acquainted with the worst in respect to her husband. The recollection of that man who

was represented to have been a labourer on his estates, and who had extorted large sums from him, haunted her mind. She remembered, likewise, that the letters which she had written to her sister, had been entrusted to the Count to be conveyed to the post, but had never reached their destination. I was evident he had suppressed them—doubtless, thought Juliana, because he feared the knowledge of his actual position must inevitably reach her if she corresponded with Constance. But she dared not prolong the discourse with her husband by demanding fresh explanations: he was acquainted with a portion of her past life's shame, and could thus silence her with a word. But she felt, that henceforth all confidence was at an end between them. On *her* side there would be mistrust of all her husband's proceedings, if at all mysterious: and on *his* side there could be no very exalted opinion of his wife's virtue.

A few days after the departure of the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle,—who, it should be observed, were on a temporary trip to Paris, his lordship still retaining the Spanish Embassy,—the Count de Toledo drove Juliana out in the phaeton. They made as usual, a considerable circuit of the delightful scenery of the neighbourhood; and as they were returning through the village, they perceived some travellers just alighting from a post-chaise which had at the moment stopped at the inn. These travellers were an elderly gentleman and lady; and Juliana, recognising them at the first glance, ejaculated, "Those vile Durands!"

"The Durands?" echoed the Count de Toledo: and at the same moment the eyes of the old gentleman and his wife were turned upon himself and Juliana.

Quick as lightning did the Count toss the reins to Juliana, bidding her drive on; and springing from the vehicle, he hastened up to the Durands from whose lips burst forth ejaculations which to Juliana's ears sounded as indicative of a most unwelcome recognition. The Count said something in a low hurried tone to the Durands; and they at once accompanied him into the hotel. Juliana was much amazed at witnessing all these proceedings,—as were likewise the stable-men and postilions, who were changing the horses. She drove slowly on, utterly bewildered as to what it could all mean,

—her husband's precipitate movements—the Durands' ejaculations—and that sudden entrance of the three into the village hostelry! But as Juliana's thoughts grew more collected, she concluded that her husband was very probably intent upon inducing the Durands, either by threats or persuasion, to abstain from propagating reports in that neighbourhood, which would prove ruinous to her own reputation.

She drove slowly on towards the cottage; and in about ten minutes the Count de Toledo rejoined her there. She was about to question him as to what had taken place, and whether the Durands had been completely silenced,—when he hurried past her, with a few words to the effect that he would tell her everything presently—and rushed up-stairs to the bed chamber. In a few moments he descended again; and sped away from the cottage. What could this mean? Had he paid a visit to the strong-box? was some deep inroad now being made upon their funds? had the Durands demanded a bribe as the price of their secrecy, notwithstanding that they had just become enriched by the death of their relation at Barcelona? Yet in no other way could Juliana account for her husband's hasty and excited proceedings; and she thought to herself that if their pecuniary resources were thus to be so continuously encroached upon by extortionate demands, they would soon be reduced to the most necessitous straits. Anxiously did she await the Count's return. In about half-an-hour he came back: but there was a visible trouble upon his features. She scarcely dared to question him—for she felt assured that in whatsoever answers he might have to give, reference to her past shame must be inevitably made.

"You are probably surprised, Juliana," he said, after three or four agitated turns to and fro in the parlour, "at what has just occurred. But no—you can scarcely be surprised: you must have comprehended full well—"

"Those vile Durands insisted, on a bribe?" said the Countess hurriedly.

"Yes: and for your sake I was compelled to submit to their extortionate demands. Our funds are now reduced to a few thousand francs."

"Heavens!" ejaculated Juliana: "have those detestable people plundered you to such a fearful extent?"

"They have," rejoined the Count; "and I almost regret that I submitted to their demands. I have no faith in them—I tremble lest, notwithstanding the bribe, they should be base enough to betray what they know! Juliana," he added suddenly, "we must leave this neighbourhood!"

"Yes, yes," she exclaimed: "that has been my wish for some days past—indeed ever since my sister and brother-in-law were here. Let us go farther into the interior of France—let us realize, by the sale of the horses and carriages, as much money as we can get together——"

"But Juliana, if we remain in France, how are we to live?" inquired the Count. "Neither yourself nor I are accustomed to habits of frugality: we cannot all in a moment settle ourselves down to economies which would amount to absolute privations."

"I can obtain certain supplies from my mother," explained Juliana.

"Not enough to enable us to live comfortably," rejoined the Count; "and I am not one who can devote himself to any employment for the purpose of increasing our resources. No!—things have come to crisis—the die is cast—my resolution is taken!"

"To do what?" demanded Juliana, as in sudden affright she anticipated the reply to her question.

"To return into Spain," he said, his features becoming all in a moment sternly and fiercely resolute.

"To dare death?" ejaculated Juliana. "No—it must not be! The Marquis of Villebelle conjured me to use my influence to prevent you from adopting so mad a course."

"But is it necessary, Juliana: it is our only alternative! There I can always command funds," he added, with a sort of exultation; "but here, on this side of the Pyrenees, we may have to encounter poverty. Nay, more—we shall never be safe against extortions and exactions. Settle where we will, the Durands may find us out: and what *then* becomes of your reputation? Juliana, I am decided: we go into Spain! Trust to me, to devise means for ensuring my own safety. You possess a strong mind—a fine spirit: you are equal to the emergency of danger——"

"But is it possible that you purpose to go boldly to your estate?" inquired the Countess: "will you take possession of your mansion?"

"I will go into the midst of my people," exclaimed the Count de Toledo,

once more with that tone and look of exultation which his countenance had already worn during this discourse "and rest assured, they will not sume to be captured so long as life remains in them!"

"But is not this a desperate mode of existence upon which we are about to enter?" asked Juliana: "will it not be far more troubled and unsettled one, than our life would be if we were to remain in France, even though subjected to extortions and threats of exposure?"

"Juliana, it is useless to reason against my resolve," replied the Count. "We will go into Spain. To-morrow I will dispose of the carriages: whatsoever little debts outstanding, shall be paid. The horses will keep for our own purposes; and the following day will we cross the frontier."

Juliana could not urge any farther monition: she saw that her husband was resolute; and she endeavoured to tranquillize herself with the reflection that his position perhaps would not be so very perilous, after all, in the midst of his own dependants,—or else he would scarcely be so outrageously rash as to carry his project into execution. At the same time, she felt that no danger could be incurred by herself; and if the worst ensued, she would be left a widow with an honourable title, though her husband had perished on the political scaffold. She now cared too little for him to be particularly afflicted at the contemplation of this eventuality: while, on the other hand, if he should really be enabled to maintain himself in the repossession of his estates, she might yet play the part of the feudal baroness as she had much longed to do. She was well aware that Spain was in an unsettled condition—that the authority of the central government at Madrid was but indifferently maintained over the spirited population of Catalonia: and the longer she reflected on the course about to be entered upon, the more did she deem it probable that her husband's views might be carried out, and that the warnings of her brother-in-law would prove to have been stretched and overstrained.

It was a little after ten o'clock in the evening of this same day, that the Count and Juliana retired to their chamber. But scarcely had they descended thither, when a trampling of horses' feet, and sounds as if of the clatter of weapons, coming from the

main road, met their ears. In an instant the Count threw open the window: the moonlight flooded the atmosphere—and the figures of several mounted *gendarmes* were distinctly visible to himself and Juliana. They had already sprung from their steeds; and it was the din of their steel sheathed swords clattering against their sides, which had reached their ears. A wild but vague terror suddenly seized on Juliana: nor was her alarm dissipated, when the Count, abruptly closing the window, said, "We must fly!"

"Fly! Wherefore? whither?" demanded his wife in an agony of apprehension. "What have you done? why come the officers of justice here?"

"We must fly, Juliana!" ejaculated the Count: "there is not a moment to lose! I will explain everything presently! Fasten on your riding-skirt—quick! quick! Follow me!"

She obeyed mechanically, and with all the haste of wild and nervous alarm;—indeed, she was too much bewildered for deliberate reflection. Her husband filled his pockets with all the coin that remained in the casket: they descended the stairs precipitately, and passed out by a back door to the stable. Two horses were saddled and bridled in almost the twinkling of an eye,—Juliana thus caparisoning her own steed for herself, which she well knew how to do; and she had all the ready activity of fortitude at this moment, notwithstanding the wild vague terrors which filled her soul.

"Now courage, Juliana!" said the Count, as he lifted her on her horse: and the next moment he sprang upon his own. "Away!"

As he uttered this last word, the loud knocking of the *gendarmes* at the cottage-door reached their ears; and it should be observed that all these proceedings on their part, conducted with such lightning rapidity, had been unobserved by the officers of justice,—inasmuch as they took place entirely in the rear of the dwelling, while the *gendarmes* had approached the cottage from the front.

"Away!"—that word was the signal for their departure.

They dashed through the back-garden: the low fence separating it from the orchard, was cleared by the two steeds: but in the orchard itself a couple of *gendarmes*, on foot, at once sprang towards them. It was evident that the precincts of the cottage were surrounded by the officers: but a word of

encouragement burst from the Count's lips—with the speed of a hurricane the two animals dashed through the orchard—a carbine was fired by one of the *gendarmes*—the next moment the report of his companion's weapon likewise rang through the air—and the bullets whistled past the ears of the fugitives. The hedge at the extremity of the orchard, was cleared: the steeds, stretching forth like greyhounds, sped over the meadows—until, in a few minutes, the road to Perpignan was reached, after the short but rapid circuit thus made. Meantime the cry of an escape had rung from the lips of the *gendarmes*: their horses were remounted—and a chase was quickly instituted. It was however ineffectual: the Count and Juliana rode on as if upon the wing of the wind; and when they presently halted to listen, as well as to breathe their panting coursers, no sounds of pursuit reached their ears from behind.

"You have borne yourself bravely, Juliana!" cried the Count, in thrilling tones of exultation.

"But what means all this?" inquired his wife. "In the name of heaven, tell me—wherefore came those officers? what have you done?"

"Away, away, Juliana!" exclaimed her husband: "this is no moment for explanations!"

Once more did the steeds career along, although there were still no sounds of pursuit: the *gendarmes* were evidently either distanced or at fault. Ever and anon, when the swiftness of the fugitives' pace was relaxed, Juliana wildly, vehemently and passionately demanded what her husband had done that he should fly from the officers?—but on each occasion he compelled her to urge on her courser again; and thus they proceeded for a couple of hours, until Perpignan was in sight—its buildings upreared, like dark crags, against the horizon of the sky that was flooded with the moon-light.

"This way!" exclaimed the Count! and they swept into a by-road which enabled them to leave Perpignan far away on the left,—while by a short cut they reached the eastern extremity of the Pyrenees. On they went,—scarcely relaxing their speed until long past midnight,—when the Count suddenly exclaimed in an exultant voice, "The boundary is crossed! We are now in Spain!"

Juliana was much exhausted: and though they now walked their steeds,

depart alone!"—and she sprang up from the couch.

"Not so, Juliana!" said her husband, catching her by the wrist, and compelling her to sit down by the side of the couch: though in justice it must be observed that he used no more force than was absolutely necessary. "You are my wife—and here you must remain."

"Remain here?" she ejaculated: and for an instant she was about to give vent to a violent gust of mingled rage and grief; but the demeanour of Ramon de Collantes overawed the one, and compelled her to stifle the other. "Tell me," she said, suddenly growing calm—but it was the unnatural calmness of utter despair,—“have you brought me hither to dwell amongst brigands?"

"For the last nine months you have been the wife of a brigand-chief," answered Collantes; "and you must accept your destiny."

"Yes—but I knew it not—God knows how far—how very far I was from suspecting it."

"To be sure!" ejaculated her husband: "how could it have been otherwise? We each had our secrets; and we kept them as long as we could. You had been the paramour of other men when you were wooed by me: I was a bandit-captain when I wooed you. I have promised to reproach you not: in common justice should you abstain from upbraiding me."

"But that false title which you assumed?" ejaculated Juliana, half frantic.

"I had as much right to usurp the rank of a nobleman, Juliana, as you had to assume the position of a virtuous woman. If I were a false Count when I led you to the altar, you were not a virgin-bride when you came into my arms."

"My God!" murmured the unhappy lady: again shivering all over: then suddenly she cried, "But how was it that my own maid deceived me? how was it that she assured me you were all that you represented yourself—that you visited at the Spanish Embassy in Paris——"

"Because your maid was accessible to my gold," answered Ramon de Collantes. "Do you suppose, Juliana, that I foresaw not that you would make inquiries? I knew that you were a thorough woman of the world; and I played as deep a game as your own."

"Why did you marry me?" demanded Juliana abruptly.

"Because I loved you—truly and sincerely loved you! I love you now—and shall ever love you, unless you give me cause to hate you. I more than half suspected, when I wooed you, that something had gone wrong with your antecedents. But I cared not for that! It was sufficient that you struck my fancy—and I resolved to possess you as a wife."

"And that tale of the change of Ministry, when we were travelling southward——"

"An opportunity which presented itself for devising an excuse not to bear you into Spain, but to stop short on the Pyrenean frontier, whence I myself could pay periodical visits——"

"To your intendant?" said Juliana, with bitter sarcasm.

"Do not speak thus—or I shall not love you much longer," answered Collantes, haughtily and sternly. "Rather thank me for having from time to time re-entered Catalonia to join my brave band for a few days, and levy contributions on travellers who passed by."

"And that man who had been a labourer on your estates?" said Juliana, still somewhat ironically, though not with so much bitterness as before.

"A scoundrel who was once a member of my band, but who through very cowardice deserted. For want of a passport, he lingered just over the frontier; and my evil destiny threw me, as you saw, in his way. I was compelled to submit to the villain's extortions——"

"And that faithful valet of your's?"

"Once of my band likewise—but a brave and trustworthy individual. He will join us doubtless in the course of the day: for the French *gendarmes* had no reason to molest him."

"Those letters of mine, which were directed to my sister?" said Juliana, continuing her queries.

"Think you that I was foolish enough to put you in correspondence with the Marchioness of Villebelle, when the Marquis could tell her that there was no such person as the Count de Toledo and she would have written you this much back in her very first answer? It was a cursed fatality that threw the Villebelles in the way of my brave band and myself: but we knew not who they were: we are not in the habit of inquiring the names of those

onies, turrets, and pinnacles, had expected to break upon her view. Immense lawn upon which she fancied it might look—the gravelled walk—pieces of artificial water—the fruit flower gardens—the outhouses for erous dependants—the adjacent s and pleasure-grounds—and the flocks covered with flocks and herds, the evidences, in short, of wealth—the external show of luxury and comfort which she had anticipated to behold where were they? She looked and in wild terror: there was something dismal and dreary, awful and striking, in the aspect of the sombre—mean and sordid, poverty-stricken and gaol-like, in the old tower.

"Where is your mansion?" she asked hurriedly and excitedly, as her hand pointed to the tower.

"There—before you!" was his response, as he pointed to the tower.

"What?" shrieked forth Juliana, well falling from her horse. "And these people—those wild-looking fellows?" she added, as several men and women, in the picturesque mountaineer costume of Catalonia—but the former carrying guns in their hands and having swords by their sides—suddenly emerged from the tower.

"Those are my people!" replied her husband. "The women will be your dependants—the men will fight for me to the very death."

"Great God!" said Juliana, in a dying tone. "Who are you?—Speak! who are you?"

"I am Ramon de Collantes!" rejoined the Count de Toledo: and his arm at the same instant thrown round her life's form, as with a piercing shriek she was about to tumble headlong from her horse.

CHAPTER CLXVII

THE BANDITTI'S TOWER.

WHEN Juliana came back to consciousness, she found herself stretched upon a bed in a poorly furnished apartment: two of the women whom she had already seen, were bending over her, administering restoratives: her husband, standing at the foot of the curtainless couch, was gazing at her. She seemed to be awaking

from a hideous dream. Wildly her looks were flung around, as if to acquire evidences that she dreamt no longer: then, as the sickening, horrifying conviction swept in upon her soul, that everything she fancied was indeed but too terribly true, she closed her eyes again, as if to shut out whatsoever objects made her thus keenly alive to her fearful position. Slowly however she opened those orbs once more; and in mute consternation—under the influence of an awful numbing dismay—she looked slowly around.

The one small window was deeply set in the thick masonry of the chamber, and had no drapery. A rude table—a few chairs—a rug upon the floor—the bed she lay on—and some other trifling articles of furniture, constituted the appointments of the room in which the brilliant Juliana, who at Saxondale House had slept upon down, and beneath a canopy of velvet, with draperies of satin and muslin, now found herself. The two women who ministered unto her, were exceedingly handsome; and with their picturesque apparel, and the profusion of jewellery which decorated their persons, they seemed far superior to the wretchedness of their abode. Her husband, as already stated, was standing at the foot of the bed,—watching with an outward air of calmness the effect which would be produced in his wife by this awakening to the consciousness of her position. His arms were folded across his breast: he looked like one who was resolute to meet whatsoever upbraidings might be levelled against him, and to glory in the fact that he was the famous robber chief Ramon de Collantes.

He now made a sign for the two women to leave the chamber; and when they had departed, he took a chair and sat down by the side of the couch. Juliana shuddered visibly at his approach. For an instant a look of sternest displeasure appeared upon his countenance: but as it quickly passed away, he said in a lofty tone, as if he chose to rise high above all reproach and upbraiding which might be vented against him, "Now Juliana, at length you are in the home to which you have so much longed to come!"

"This my home?" she exclaimed, with another visible tremor, as her eyes swept around the dreary, desolate apartment. "No, no—I will not remain here! Let me go hence! I will

he obtained for the liberation of the captives in his instance. It appeared that the gentleman and his valet were travelling post towards Madrid, having entered Spain by way of Figueras—that the detachment of banditti stopped the equipage—and that after desperate but ineffectual attempts at resistance, the traveller and his domestic were overpowered. There was no considerable sum of ready-money found upon the gentleman's person—no more than he might have deemed sufficient for his expenses to the Spanish capital; but, on the other hand, he had in his pocket-book letters of credit on a banker in that city for a very large amount. It was this fact which—in pursuance of their usual policy in such cases—had induced the banditti to bring the traveller and his valet as captives to the tower. The post-chaise had been left to return to Figueras,—the banditti however allowing the gentleman to pay the postilions their due—a course which they invariably adopted and which led to the very natural supposition that there might be some little private understanding between the outlaws and the drivers in those districts.

The gentleman was about six or seven-and-twenty years of age—tall—well made—and handsome,—with a frank ingenuous expression of countenance. His hair was of a rich brown, curling naturally: his eyes were blue: his features were somewhat delicate, and classically modelled. Altogether, his appearance was most agreeable: his voice was rich and harmonious; and his manners were polished and elegant. But now he wore a haughty and indignant look: he betrayed not the slightest sentiment of fear: indeed his courage had been well proven in his resistance to the banditti; and it was fortunate for him that in being overpowered at last, he had sustained no hurt more serious than a few bruises. His valet, also an Englishman, was a middle-aged, sedate-looking person—but one who could no doubt display a courageous resolution in the moment of emergency.

Ramon de Collantes addressed the English gentleman in the Spanish tongue first: but finding that it was little understood by the traveller, he proceeded to speak in French. In this language the captive was proficient; and the discourse therefore flowed on easily. The brigand-chief

assured Mr. Forester.—for such the gentleman's name appeared to be, according to his passport and letters of credit,—that he need be under no apprehension in respect to his life, nor of ill-treatment; provided, he would consent to purchase his liberty; and that during the interval which must elapse ere the ransom-money could be obtained from Madrid, he should experience as much attention and as good accommodation as under circumstances might be afforded. Mr. Forester,—whom the reader will recollect as having been William Deveril's second in the duel with Lord Harold Staunton,—saw no alternative but to accept the proposition. He found himself a prisoner in the midst of a wild region—at the mercy of a lawless band; and he was compelled to subdue his pride for his own personal convenience. It is true that he was only travelling for his pleasure, being of no profession and possessing a handsome independent income: but still, though his time was so completely his own, it appeared to him by no means agreeable to pass more of it than was absolutely necessary in the quarters of a bandit horde. He therefore, though not without reluctance, consented to the terms laid down by Ramon de Collantes.

But now arose some little difficulty. This was not a mere matter of presenting a cheque at a banker's in any city or town more or less remote, and which could be accomplished by any one of the men suitably apparelled in a simple citizen's garb for the purpose: but it was to obtain cash on a letter of credit which by rights should be presented at the Madrid banker's by the individual in whose favour it was drawn. It was therefore a proceeding that required tact and management: and Ramon de Collantes saw no alternative but to undertake the business himself. At the first thought he did not much relish the idea of leaving his wife, whom he really loved, alone for ten days or a fortnight at the tower, during the very first period of her residence there, and when her impatient spirit ought to be checked by all his power of control. But his second reflection was of quite the opposite character; and he reasoned that it would perhaps be all the better to leave her thus for a short space to the monotonous kind of existence she would have to lead, so that on his return his presence would be welcomed by her as a cheering relief. Therefore

Ramon de Collantes decided upon proceeding in person to Madrid, to obtain the ransom money.

He represented to Mr. Forester that it was absolutely necessary he should write some credentials which would sufficiently account to the Madrid banker for the letter of credit being presented by another person instead of the individual in whose favour it was drawn. To this proposition Forester assented without much difficulty: for he himself saw that it was absolutely necessary, and he was too anxious to recover his freedom to throw any obstacle in the way. He accordingly wrote as if from Figueras, stating that he had been suddenly taken ill there—that his funds were exhausted—and that inasmuch as his friend Senor Escosura (the name assumed by Ramon de Collantes for his intended journey) was about to visit Madrid, he had entrusted him with the mission of obtaining a supply of ready cash.

When thus possessed of the necessary documents, Ramon de Collantes ascended to the chamber where he had left his wife; and informed her that circumstances compelled him to undertake an immediate journey, on which he might be some days absent. Juliana instantaneously perceived that this occurrence might probably furnish her, if she played her game well, with an opportunity of escape: but in order to obtain this opportunity, it was necessary she should have as much freedom as possible—to which end it was equally requisite to throw her husband off his guard. She therefore at once simulated grief and alarm at the thought of separation. She begged him to forgive her for the first feelings of aversion which she had exhibited towards her new home,—representing to him that he must make all allowances under the circumstances in which she was placed—but vowing that she was not the less interested in his safety. In short she enacted her part so well as to lull her husband to a certain degree into security on her account: but he nevertheless resolved that until his return she should be continuously watched and have as little liberty as possible. He bade her farewell; and she still kept up her dissimulation by much weeping and sobbing. Previous to his departure, he gave the strictest injunctions to the members of the band as to the precise amount of freedom which his

wife and the two prisoners (Mr. Forester and his valet) were respectively to be allowed;—having done which, he set out on his journey.

One of the females appointed to attend upon Juliana, spoke French fluently; and from her lips the brigand captain's wife accordingly understood that she would be permitted to take exercise within a circuit of a mile of the tower; and similar communication was made to the prisoners. Juliana learnt from the same source of the presence of these prisoners at the tower; and on hearing that they were fellow-country men, she was suddenly inspired by the secret hope that if she were enabled to communicate with them, they would aid in her escape. She did not however think it prudent to precipitate the means which might be adopted as a test to ascertain whether she should be enabled to communicate with them or not; she therefore remained in her own chamber throughout the whole of that first day of her sojourn at the tower. In the evening the valet who had been left behind at the cottage in the French village, made his appearance at the robbers' stronghold; and Juliana learnt that her own maid—whom she had originally engaged in Paris—had declined to accompany the valet to rejoin her mistress, now that she knew that her master, instead of being the Count de Toledo; was a famous brigand-chief. We should likewise add that Juliana despatched, according to her husband's instructions, one of the women to Barcelona, to make such purchase as were requisite; and in the meantime she managed as well as she was able with all such necessaries for the toilet as the females, whose wardrobes were by no means badly supplied, were enabled to furnish.

On the following day Juliana availed herself of her privilege to walk in the neighbourhood of the tower: and presently she beheld a gentleman whom she at once concluded to be the English prisoner, roaming about likewise. It was beyond the limits of the grove of cork-trees that she thus descried him: but as her looks swept around with a wider range, she noticed six or seven of the banditti posted on eminences at certain intervals, so as to engirdle, as it were with a *cordon* of sentinels, the precincts of the tower. These men seemed to be lounging idly about, as if intent on no particular object: but their carbines

were slung over their shoulders—their swords were by their sides—and the sunbeams glinted upon the pistols and the poniard-handles in their belts. Therefore Juliana knew full well why those men were thus dispersed around; and the hope of escape diminished somewhat in her bosom.

Mr. Forester—having maintained the haughtiest reserve towards all the members of the band, both male and female,—had not exchanged any unnecessary word with even those who could speak French; and therefore he had not learnt that there was an English lady at the tower, and that she was the chieftain's wife. He was consequently surprised when he beheld a female apparelled in a garb totally different from that of the other women whom he had as yet seen, and which belonged to the fashions suited for the meridian of Paris or of London. At first he took her to be a Spaniard: for such an impression might well be conveyed by Juliana's appearance,—her hair being of raven darkness, her eyes black and full of fire, and her complexion a delicate olive. He thought of turning aside and passing in another direction,—believing her to be a member of the band: when it struck him that, like himself, she might possibly be a captive. He therefore continued to advance; and the nearer he drew, the more forcibly did it occur to him that she could scarcely be a native of Spain—but that her splendid beauty and gorgeously developed form, together with her mien and carriage so statusque and lady-like, denoted her as a country-woman of his own.

"Then she must be a prisoner!" he thought: and taking off his hat, he made her a courteous salutation.

"Now," said Juliana to herself, "for the test whether or not I am allowed to speak to this English gentleman!"

Her eyes were swept rapidly around as she also advanced: there was no unusual movement amongst the sentries posted at intervals about—no one hurried forth from the tower to forbid this meeting: and with joy as well as with rekindling hope in her heart, she accosted the captive.

"You are a prisoner, if I mistake not?" she said in her most affable manner, but at the same time with a look of commiseration and mournfulness.

"Yes, madam—such is my fate for the present," responded Mr. Forester, perfectly dazzled by the beauty which,

diminishing not on a nearer view, characterized the lady. "And you?"

"Alas, a prisoner likewise!" returned Juliana, with a profound sigh. "But what is worse," she went on hurriedly to observe, anxious to get over the requisite explanations, which were as painful as they were unavoidable, with all possible despatch,—*"I am the victim of the foulest treachery—But how can I confess it? And yet the tale must be told! I am the captain's wife."*

Mr. Forester staggered with a wild amazement. Was it possible that this lady whose manners had evidently been formed in the most polished circles, and whose splendid beauty was fit to embellish the gilded saloons of fashion, instead of being buried in the midst of Catalonia's wastes,—was it possible that she was the consort of Ramon de Collantes?

"Ah, sir!" cried Juliana, "you may well be smitten with astonishment: but the tale I have told you is only too true. The particulars—humiliating enough for me—can be concisely summed up. I was residing in France—I was thrown in the way of one who bore the name of the Count de Toledo—and whom I beheld living like a nobleman of wealth amongst the gayest circles of Paris. He offered me his hand—he was accepted—and we were married. This was eight or nine months ago—"

"And for nine months you have been in this man's power?" ejaculated Forester, with an astonishment but little abating.

"It was but yesterday that I knew everything," replied Juliana. "Yesterday morning was I brought hither, under the impression that I was coming to take up my abode in a splendid mansion situated in the midst of a vast domain; and you may conceive, sir, the horror and anguish of my feelings, when my husband, suddenly throwing off the mask—which indeed he could no longer wear—proclaimed himself Ramon de Collantes!"

"Good heavens, lady!" cried Mr. Forester, his handsome countenance colouring with indignation, and all his heart's sympathies at once enlisted in Juliana's favour: "what diabolic treachery! But pardon me—I forgot at the moment I was speaking of your husband."

"You would be justified in entertaining a very evil opinion of me

indeed," quickly rejoined Juliana. "if you fancied that I could still experience the feelings of a wife towards that man. No, sir—I hate and detest the villain who has deceived me. Husband indeed! Never can I think of him as such again: nor would the law hold me bound by ties contracted under circumstances so frightfully perfidious."

"You are right, madam," answered Forester, his sympathies deepening on her behalf when he found her taking what he considered to be so proper a view of her position. You will not deem it idle flattery if I express my belief—from your appearance, your manners, and your discourse—that you have been accustomed to move in a sphere very different from that in which you now find yourself?"

"I have indeed!" rejoined Juliana mournfully: and then she reflected for a few instants whether she should tell the English gentleman who she really was.

She feared the possibility, if not the probability, of his having heard of that dreadful exposure which took place at Saxondale Castle, and which had been rapidly circulated at the time throughout the fashionable world of England. But, on the other hand, there was the chance that the incident had never reached his ears at all; and if she were to stop short here—giving no farther explanations relative to herself, and naming not the family to which she belonged—he might naturally look with suspicion upon all the rest of her tale, and would be justified in supposing that she was playing some hypocritical part.

"Yes," she went on to observe, her mind being promptly made up to the alternative of frankness at any risk; "I did indeed move in a different sphere. Perhaps the name of Saxondale is not unfamiliar to you?"

"Unfamiliar!" cried Forester, with renewed amazement. "It is that of an English nobleman——"

"Whose sister I am" added Juliana. "Once the Hon. Miss Farefield—now a bandit's wife!"

"Good heavens! and you were Miss Farefield?" exclaimed Forester. "But you are Miss Farefield still: for, as you are now rightly observed, the law cannot possibly sanction a marriage into which you were so treacherously inveigled. Madam," he continued, in a hurried tone—for he was much excited on Juliana's behalf—her dazzling beauty too having

produced no trifling effect upon him,— "if I can be of any assistance to you, command my services. In a few days I myself shall be free; and I vow before heaven to devote my liberty to the duty of effecting yours!"

Juliana warmly expressed her acknowledgments for this assurance; and a weight was lifted from her mind—for she felt convinced, by Mr. Forester's looks, words, and manner, that he was acquainted with nothing prejudicial to her character. This indeed was the fact: for immediately after the duel, Forester had gone abroad, and had remained many months on the Continent ere returning to England. When he did revisit the British metropolis, the scandal attaching itself in diverse ways to the name of Saxondale, was past and gone—or at least was lost sight of in the contemplation of fresh incidents occurring in the fashionable world. Then, too, his stay in London had been very short: and though he saw Deveril, yet our hero had in the meantime learnt that Lady Saxondale was his mother, and he would not therefore breathe a syllable against her. Mr. Forester returned to the Continent, where he had since been residing or travelling. He therefore knew absolutely nothing prejudicial to the character of Juliana,—however poor his opinion might be of her mother in consequence of the revelations made to him by Deveril at the time of the duel.

"You have promised to befriend me," said Juliana; "and heaven knows how much I stand in need of such friendship! To whom am I indebted for this generous offer?"

"My name is Forester," was the English gentleman's response: "and my pecuniary means are ample."

"That name of Forester," at once struck Juliana as not being altogether unknown to her, though she never remembered to have seen this gentleman before. Suddenly she recollected the name in connexion with the duel between Deveril and Staunton; but still, as it was by no means an uncommon one, it did not follow that this should be the identical individual who acted as second on that occasion.

"I see," he observed with a partial smile, "that my name has struck you somewhat. But it is no reason that I should refuse to devote my services to the daughter, because at one time I

befriended a gentleman who sustained some injury from the mother."

"I understand the allusion, Mr. Forester," said Juliana; "and I thank you for the delicacy of the terms in which it is couched."—at the same time she was still assured that he knew nothing to her own prejudice. "It will not be well for us to be seen too much together. Behold you those sentinels placed all around? They are as much to keep watch upon me as upon yourself; and as the first thought of captives is always how to escape, these vile outlaws may possibly suspect that our discourse has a tendency in that direction. We shall have opportunities of meeting again; but you will not be offended if in the presence of witness I treat you with coldness and reserve."

"Prudence dictates that course, Miss Farefield—for by that name shall I call you:" and Forester, again lifting his hat, pursued his way in one direction, while Juliana moved off in another.

CHAPTER CLXVIII.

MR. FORESTER

SEVERAL days passed, during which Juliana and Mr. Forester frequently met; and as not the slightest notice was taken of their proceedings—or, at least, as no syllable of remonstrance against these encounters was spoken to either—they felt assured that Ramon de Collantes, ere taking his departure, had left no instructions to prevent the civilities of such intercourse between them. They therefore prolonged their walks in each other's society—not merely to discuss plans for an escape, but likewise because they felt more and more pleasure in being together. We have already said that Juliana's beauty had produced an immediate effect upon Mr. Forester; and she could not help contrasting his handsome person and elegant manners with the coarser attributes of her husband. Besides, the circumstances under which they thus met, were tinged with a romance full well calculated to draw them thus towards each other.

But why did they discuss plans for an immediate escape, if such were practicable? why did they not wait until the return of Collantes should restore Forester to liberty, and thus leave him free to take whatsoever means circumstances should suggest for the liberation of Juliana? It was

because she feared that when once her husband came back, she would be too completely in the thralldom of his vigilance to enable any one from a distance to ensure her flight: she trembled at the idea of being left behind by this friend whom accident had thrown in her way; and moreover, as above stated, she already experienced a tender feeling in his behalf. On his side, he was equally sensible of those difficulties, just enumerated, which would have to be encountered in liberating Juliana: he was smitten with her beauty; and he would gladly acquire a claim upon her by the performance of some chivalrous exploit, or the carrying out of some well laid stratagem, in order to deliver her from the power of her bandit-husband.

"The time is passing," said Juliana, one forenoon about eight or nine days after her arrival at the tower; "and as yet nothing is decided. He may return sooner than we anticipate——"

"The time has passed so agreeably in one sense," observed Forester,— "and indeed I am now in no hurry for the return of Collantes——"

"But if he should return speedily," urged Juliana, bending upon her companion, a tender look—for she comprehended full well the meaning of his words; "what will become of me? Oh! what shall I do if you were to leave me here alone? I should feel as if abandoned by my only friend!"

"Miss Farefield," responded Forester: earnestly, "I swear to you that I am incapable of abandoning you by my own free will. Come—let us seriously, and if possible for the last time, deliberate upon some plan of flight."

"Alas!" said Juliana, "I see not how it is to be effected. Sentinels watch at the entrance of the tower by night; and in the day-time it would be utter madness to attempt escape."

"I know not that it would be such utter madness," observed Forester, as an idea gradually developed itself in his mind. "If I thought that you were able to gallop a steed fearlessly——"

"Oh, indeed I am!" ejaculated Juliana, as the remembrance of her rapid flight from the cottage in company with her husband, came back to her mind. But what plan has suggested itself?"

"Supposing that we had two steeds ready saddled," said Mr. Forester, "and that watching an opportunity, we sprang upon their backs and committed ourselves to chance? There

would be this risk probably—that bullets would whistle about our ears. For myself, I care not—And perhaps those sentinels posted around, would hesitate to fire at their captain's wife—Pardon me for reminding you of your position.”

“They would fire—rest assured that they would fire!” rejoined Juliana. “Wherefore are they posted on those heights?”

“To fire upon me or my domestic, if we attempted to escape—but surely not to level their deadly weapons against you!”

“And even if we agreed to run that risk,” said Juliana,—“what plan have you settled in your mind as to the horses?”

“This morning, ere I rejoined you,” replied Mr. Forester, “I passed by the stable: the door was open—and I strolled in. I had no definite motive for so doing: it was merely to see the animals. No one was there at the moment: the saddles and bridles were ready at hand—If I had chosen, I could even then have self-appropriated one of the steeds. There is a lady's saddle—I noticed it—”

“It is mine!” ejaculated Juliana; and as a wild thrill of hope shot through her heart, she added, “Would to heaven that I were seated in it now! Cheerfully would I risk the volleys that might be poured down by the fire-arms of the banditti!”

“Then, if you have the courage to dare the venture,” exclaimed Forester, gazing with admiration upon the lady, “let our plan be thus settled. But we must fly alone together: I must abandon my domestic to the mercy of these fellows. Ah! an idea has struck me. The letter of credit upon the Madrid banker is for fifteen hundred pounds; and I have given Ramon de Collantes authority to receive eight hundred. I will leave behind me a note to the effect that if he suffers my domestic to depart in safety, he may receive the remainder of the amount as a ransom; and I will likewise pen a proper authority to that effect.”

“What generous sacrifices you are making on my behalf!” said Juliana, with another tender look at her companion.

“Were they ten thousand times greater they should be cheerfully made,” responded Forester, who doubtless anticipated that the lady would not fail to display her gratitude to any extent which he might be bold enough to solicit.

“And the risk that you will run added Juliana.

“I can dare death in the hope of enjoying life in your society,” was companion's rejoinder.

“She bent down her looks, and peered for a few moments to be overwhelmed with confusion: for it impossible to mistake the significance of that avowal.

“And when,” she asked, lifting eyes again, “shall we put the plan into execution?”

“It is impossible to fix a moment,” he answered: “we must trust to the chapter of accidents. Fortunately the door of the stable is not within view of the entrance to the tower; therefore whosoever may be loitering about in front of the edifice, will not have any cause to suspect what is being done in the stable. To-morrow morning, shortly after the break of day, I will stroll forth. You can wait at hand. It were well perhaps you should come without your bonnet: it will have the appearance as if merely meant to imbibe a little fresh air, without even walking beyond the precincts of the wood. I will watch for an opportunity to beckon you into the stable. If fortune favour us, all will be done in a few instants; and we shall be discovered—if our plan be defeated—we can only anticipate the privation of liberty until the return of the Collantes.”

“Be it all as you say,” rejoined Juliana; and in order that there should be no cause for suspicion, let her to day remain as little together as possible.”

“Prudence compels me to submit,” rejoined Forester: “but my own notions prompt the reverse.”

Juliana hung upon her companion with another tender look; and they parted,—he rambling in one direction and she re-entering the tower. For the rest of that day her heart was almost incessant flutter, with mingled apprehension and hope. How longed to quit that gloomy half-ruined tower!—and what pleasure to have the handsome and agreeable Forester as the companion of flight! She felt assured that he would not be content with merely leaving her in security: he would not at her when having rescued her from the power of the banditti. His look and his words had alike told her that

anticipated a recompense for the tremendous risk he was about to run on her behalf. Yet—and it was by no means likely he would sue in vain at the feet of one whose temperament was so sensuous and luxurious as that of Juliana.

The hours passed—the evening came—and she retired to rest: but sleep did not soon visit her eyes. She lay revolving in her mind all the details of the plan laid down for their flight: she could not shut out from her conviction that it was fraught with danger—that it amounted almost to the actual madness of desperation: but in its very boldness existed the hope of success. At all events, it was worth while to run the risk: she would sooner perish by one of the winged balls from a carbine, than linger out her existence in that dreadful place;—and even if she were captured and brought back, her position could scarcely be rendered much worse than it already was. Therefore her fortitude failed not; and even while envisaging all the perils to be incurred and the consequences of failure, she never for a moment hesitated in the adoption of the project.

On his side, Mr. Forester was equally resolute. He had become deeply enamoured of Juliana: her magnificent beauty had produced a strong impression on his heart; and he felt assured that he would not be compelled to sigh vainly at her feet, if fortunate enough to prove her deliverer. He was naturally of a brave and chivalrous disposition; and if the romantic circumstances in which he had encountered Juliana had exercised its influence over his feelings and sympathies, there was likewise something stirring and exciting, bold and dashing, in the feat which had to be performed to crown his triumph. Not for a moment, therefore, did he shrink from the enterprise; and he was even sanguine of success.

He rose in the morning earlier than usual; and tearing out some leaves from his pocket-book, penned the documents of which he had spoken to Juliana, and which he purposed to leave behind him. He had no better writing-paper: he dared not ask for any; and as he knew full well that the Madrid banker would not be satisfied with a mere scrap written upon with a pencil, he assured Collantes in the note addressed to him, that he would from the first town write by post to the

banker,—pledging his honour as a gentleman that it should not be with any hostile purpose. Besides, his valet would remain in the hands of the banditti as a hostage for the faithful performance of the compact thus volunteered; and all things considered, Forester felt that he could not possibly manage the proceeding better. His object of course was to ensure the safe egress of his domestic from the tower; and the means he was taking appeared to be all-sufficient for the purpose. To his valet he did not however breathe a word of his intentions: the man would not like the idea of being left behind; and on the other hand, as it was perilous enough for two persons to attempt an escape, it would be still more against the chances of success if there were to embark upon the enterprise.

Having partaken of the breakfast, which in due course was brought up to his apartment, Mr. Forester—securing about his person the papers which he had written—descended the staircase, and sauntered forth from the tower in a leisurely manner. A couple of the banditti were seated on a bench in front, eating their morning meal; and according to his usual habit, he passed them by without taking the slightest notice of them. They exchanged observations in their own native tongue, to the effect that “the Englishman need not be so haughtily proud:” and went on devouring their rations. After making a slight circuit, Forester approached the stable; and at the same instant he saw Juliana at a little distance. She had followed his advice, by descending from her chamber without her bonnet: she walked about for a little while in front of the tower; and then, as if quite in an abstracted mood, passed round to the side.

Forester had flung his looks hastily into the stable, and felt satisfied that no one was there. He beckoned to Juliana, who at once followed him into the place. Quick as thought he took down her side-saddle from the peg on which it was placed: but at the same instant a sudden noise was heard at the farther extremity of the stable; and a bandit, who had hitherto been concealed by a pile of hay against which he was seated while discussing his morning meal, emerged to their view. The fellow instantaneously suspected Forester’s designs; and drawing his poniard, flew towards him.

A shriek rose up to Juliana’s lips, as she thought that all was lost: but

But only for a few moments—and then their course was continued at the same whirlwind swiftness as before. Another half-hour, and they drew in the reins again. Many miles of ground had now been passed over: the countenance of each was suffused with a crimson glow. How splendidly beautiful seemed Juliana in the eyes of Forester! how handsome did he appear to the view of the lady!

It was while they were thus walking their horses for the few moments they allowed themselves as breathing-time, that the quick trampling of a steed coming from ahead reached their ears; and a turning in the wild unbeaten way which they were pursuing, suddenly brought them full in the presence of Ramon de Collantes. A terrific ejaculation of rage burst from the lips of the robber chief, as he in a moment recognised his wife and Forester. The Englishman would not have hesitated to stop and dare a conflict with the brigand: but Juliana, with a cry of alarm, urged her steed into all the swiftness of which she was capable—so that Forester was compelled to keep pace with her; and as sweeping past Collantes with the speed of a vanishing dream, they were beyond his view in a moment.

So astounded was he at what he had just seen, that he remained motionless for a few instants where he had suddenly reined in his horse: then with another ejaculation of fury, he wheeled the animal round and dashed in pursuit. Forester and Juliana both expected that he would adopt this course; and the former exclaimed, "If it come to a death-struggle, my fair companion, you shall only fall back into the bandit captain's power when I shall be no more alive to defend you!"

Juliana was far from anxious that such a scene should take place; and she therefore compelled her courser to dash on in its wild career. They now entered upon a beaten road,—but either having the slightest idea in which direction it led. They looked back: Ramon de Collantes was still in pursuit—he was about two hundred yards behind.

"Courage!" ejaculated Forester: and it was the cry he had been continuously sending forth, for he feared lest Juliana's strength and spirit should suddenly give way.

But as she still held gallantly on, in her precipitate flight, that apprehension wore off; and he experienced

an exultant admiration for the heroism which she thus displayed. The luxuriant masses of her raven hair floated upon the gushing wind which was excited by their rapid progress through the air: the richest glow was upon her cheeks—fire burnt in her eyes—her lips, apart, afforded glimpses of her brilliant teeth—and she sat like an Amazon upon the steed which bore her along.

Collantes was evidently gaining ground; and all of a sudden a pistol-bullet whistled past Forester's ear.

"Good heavens!" cried Juliana; "he has fire arms!"—and for an instant a dizziness came over her.

"Courage!" again shouted Forester. "Look! look!" he instantaneously added: "we are saved! You are beyond danger! Look look!"

And as his beautiful companion quickly turned her eyes in the direction to which he pointed, she beheld a squadron of cavalry descending an eminence. In a few minutes the soldiers, who at the spectacle of that chase put spurs to their chargers, were close upon the roadside:—Forester and Juliana drew in their reins—they were in the midst of protectors.

"Ramon de Collantes!" ejaculated Forester, pointing in the direction where the bandit-chief had a few instants back been pursuing them.

"Ramon de Collantes!" echoed every voice in the troop; and in a moment there was a headlong gallop in pursuit of the formidable brigand.

He had likewise caught sight of the soldiery: his steed was wheeled round in a moment—and he was in full retreat. But his horse was wearied by the chase after the fugitives; and in a short time he was overtaken. Like a lion at bay, he turned and faced his twenty opponents. A pistol was discharged at the foremost; and at the very instant the soldier, reeling back in his saddle with a mortal wound, was about to fall from his horse, Ramon de Collantes clutched at the sword which was dropping from his grasp. Then, with all the mad fury of desperation, did he strike right and left—ghastly wounds were inflicted—but it was only for a few instants that he thus was enabled valiantly to defend himself. A pistol bullet pierced his brain, stretching him lifeless in the road.

Some of the soldiers, who were about thirty in all, had remained to protect

at therefore aware that there could be any opposition to Edmund's complete accession;—but, as above stated she still felt curious and interested upon the point.

The result of her reflections, as she do by Forester's side, was two-fold:—first, that she would abandon herself to an amour which, whether destined to prove transient or permanent, would necessarily depend upon circumstances and secondly, that she would return to England.

Forester did not for some time interrupt Juliana's meditations, though he is very far from penetrating into their true nature. He thought that she might possibly experience a certain shock—if that actual grief—at the sudden and violent death of a man who, no matter what his character and calling were had nevertheless been her husband. But after a while, Forester broke the silence which had followed their separation from the band of soldiers; and he said, "You are thinking, my fair heroine, of the catastrophe which has taken place?"

"And at which it were a wretched imitation on my part," she rejoined, "to say that I am afflicted."

"You speak in a proper spirit," observed Forester: "It is impossible to ignore the death of the traitor who deceived you. But meseems that we could do well to converse upon our plans. I said ere now that I should proceed to Barcelona—a resolve to which I came without consulting you, for the simple reason that I am penniless. All ready money I had about me at the time of my capture by the brigands, passed into their hands. At Barcelona I can stop at some hotel, while I write to my friends and procure supplies."

"Fortunately," responded Juliana, "I have some little money in my purse, which will bear our expenses on the road to Barcelona: for you see," she added with downcast eyes, "I am compelled to rely myself on your companionship until we reach that city."

"Thanks for this assurance!" exclaimed Forester: and then he observed in a low voice and a tender manner, "Where should this companionship, so sweet to me, terminate at Barcelona?"

"Wherefore?" ejaculated Juliana, looking to regard him with a look of some surprise. "Because it is my intention to return to England with as little delay as possible."

"And I also shall return to England," replied Forester, though the instant before he had not even thought of such a proceeding—much less made up his mind to it. "Will you permit to escort you back to our native land? Truly, my fair heroine,—for such familiar terms must you suffer me to adopt,—you have passed through too many perilous adventures to render it agreeable for you to travel alone. Ah! my dear Juliana!" he suddenly exclaimed, "can you not understand that you have inspired me with a passion which will not permit me to leave you voluntarily?"

Juliana gave no reply; she averted her looks, and appeared to be reflecting profoundly: but Forester felt persuaded that his meaning was understood, and that his fair companion would not prove a very difficult conquest.

We will not linger upon the details of this journey which they performed together. We must however observe that at the first town they reached, Juliana purchased a bonnet and a riding-habit: for the reader will recollect in what condition she had fled from the tower. It took them three days to reach the Catalan capital,—the intermediate nights being passed in towns where they halted. But Juliana did not immediately abandon herself to the arms of her companion: she did not choose him to think his conquest too cheap, or that her virtue was too facile. The farther however they advanced on the road, the more tender grew their discourse; and when Barcelona was in sight, they came to such an understanding together, that Forester was sufficiently encouraged to propose that she should pass as his wife at the hotel where they were about to take up their abode.

And now let us suppose them arrived there. Handsome apartments were at once obtained—a sumptuous repast was served up—and inspired by exhilarating champagne, the two travellers could now look back with smiles and triumph at the perils they had passed through and the fatigues they had endured. We may even go a little farther, and depict Forester on his knees at the feet of the handsome Juliana—his arms encircling her waist—his head resting upon her bosom—while she, with her fine dark eyes swimming in a voluptuous languor.

looked down upon his truly handsome countenance. He forgot that she had been a bandit's wife: he beheld only in her a woman of grandly luxurious beauty—and he was rejoiced at the conquest he had achieved.

Mr. Forester failed not to write to the banker at Madrid to whom he explained all the circumstances under which his letter of credit had been originally presented by Ramon de Collantes. In due course he received an answer, informing him that the genuine character of the transaction had been suspected—that there had seemed something strange in the very nature of the letter which it was pretended had been written from an hotel at Figueras—and that the person representing himself as Senor Escosura was required to bring forward credible witnesses to guarantee his respectability. This was a demand with which Ramon de Collantes had evidently found it somewhat inconvenient to comply—for he did not present himself a second time to the banker, who therefore saw that he had exercised a sound discretion. To be brief, this gentleman's communication farther informed Forester that the amount represented in the letter of credit was now duly remitted to a banker at Barcelona.

In the interval the valet arrived safe and sound from the tower. The intelligence he brought may be summed up in a few words. A few hours after the escape of his master and Juliana took place, an alarm was raised, to the effect that the military were approaching. From what the valet could judge, an immediate council of war was held by the banditti—the result being a determination to make a desperate stand: for if they were to take to flight, it was but too evident they would be pursued, and in that straggling form cut to pieces. As the squadron approached, it was received with volleys of musketry, poured forth from the windows of the tower: but the soldiers bore themselves bravely—stormed the building—and succeeded in capturing those of the band who were not slain in the onslaught. The prisoners thus taken, were despatched under a proper escort to Barcelona,—and the valet took advantage of the circumstance to accompany the military. As for the females of the band, they were generously suffered by the officer in command of the squadron, to go at large. It farther appeared that, immense

quantities of wood being cut down and collected for the purpose, the tower was too solid for the work of ruin to be complete; the place was nevertheless reduced to a condition that would render it unfit to harbour any of the other brigand hordes which still infested Catalonia.

The prisoners who were sent to Barcelona, suffered in due time upon the scaffold; but long ere their execution took place, Forester and Juliana, attended by the valet, arrived in England. Juliana speedily ascertained that her mother and Edmund were still residing at Saxondale House in Park Lane; and she intimated to Forester her intention of passing at least a few days with them. He was quite well enough pleased with his conquest to wish to retain her as mistress, though he had not the slightest idea of making her his wife. He therefore besought that she would no longer remain absent from him; and he would take some agreeable residence in the neighbourhood of London whither to bear her after her visit to Saxondale House. On her own side Juliana was equally well pleased with Mr. Forester; and she promised to grant his request. Under these circumstances they parted: and without any previous notification of her intended visit, Juliana one fine morning made her appearance in the presence of her mother and Edmund—we may likewise add of Lord Harold Staunton: for he, though no actually domiciled at Saxondale House nevertheless passed the greater portion of his time there.

CHAPTER CLXIX

LINKS IN THE CHAIN OF EVIDENCE.

WE must now once more transport the reader into Lincolnshire. About sixteen months had elapsed since the circumstances of our story riveted attention upon Saxondale Castle and its neighbourhood: we allude to the period when Adelaide met her death, in the waters of the Trent, at the hands of her own husband. Since that era neither the guilty young man nor Lady Saxondale had revisited the Castle; and the circumstance which had created so great a sensation at the time, had almost

ceased to be spoken of by the dwellers in that district.

It was about the time of Juliana's return to Saxondale House in London, that the incidents we are about to record took place in Lincolnshire. One fine day—at the beginning of April, 1846—Mr. Hawkshaw was riding out on horse-back, when he encountered his friend Mr. Denison, who was likewise taking equestrian exercise. They had not previously met for some weeks, inasmuch as the old gentleman had been on a visit to the Marquis of Eagledean at Edenbridge Park in Kent, and had only returned on the day previous to which we are writing.

"My dear friend," exclaimed Hawkshaw, when they had shaken hands and exchanged the usual compliments, "I was just thinking of you as I saw wondering when you proposed to come back. What tidings bring you from Edenbridge? All our friends well and happy, as when last I saw them some fifteen or sixteen months back?"

"Ah! that was on the occasion of the four weddings," observed Denison; "and you remember that I also was of the party. Yes, they are all well and happy: indeed I know not wherefore they should be otherwise. I have been paying a perfect round of visits; and I have letters for you, Hawkshaw, pressing you to do the same. My groom has ridden over to the Hall with them; and so you will have them on your return."

"Were I not going to Gainsborough on a little business," responded the Squire, "I would hasten home for the pleasure of reading them. But you can tell me from whom they come."

"Rather ask me," exclaimed Denison, with smile, "from whom they do not come. Why, all our friends who are connected with the Marquis, have written. First of all, there is the Marquis himself, who insists that you shall pay him a visit at Edenbridge—where, by the bye, he dwells almost entirely: for, as you are aware, he has bestowed the Stamford Manor estate upon his son Francis and the beautiful Angela. I passed a couple of days at Stamford Manor, and was delighted with the perfect picture of domestic happiness which there prevails. You cannot fancy how young Paton has improved: he has quite a manly appearance, and has almost lost that boyish beauty which, so to speak, used to characterize him. He is now a

handsome young man. His wife Angela is, if possible, more lovely than when we saw her led a bride to the altar and when I had the honour of giving her away. They have a beautiful boy—now three months old—of whom, as you may suppose, they are dotingly fond. Frank has written, inviting you to the Manor."

"I shall assuredly accept the invitation," replied Hawkshaw—"and that of the Marquis also. Whom else did you see?"

"Count Christoval and his splendid Countess. You know that his lordship has purchased a fine estate in the neighbourhood of Edenbridge; so that the Countess sees her father the Marquis of Eagledean nearly every day. On my honour, if it were possible for her ladyship to look handsomer than she was wont to do, she does now:—matrimony has improved her. She is a splendid woman!"

"They have no children, I believe?" remarked Hawkshaw.

"None," answered Denison: "but the Count is not the less devoted to his wife on that score. They are all in all to each other, and do not seem to want any addition to their family. The tenants and peasantry on their estate speak in the highest terms of them: the Count is an excellent landlord; and the Countess is profuse, though secret and unostentatious, with her charities. You will find amongst your letters one from that excellent-hearted Spanish nobleman, inviting you to stay with him."

"Another visit that I am resolved to pay," responded Hawkshaw. These pictures of domestic felicity quite enchanted me. Pray proceed with them."

"Oh, they are not yet exhausted," exclaimed Denison. "I visited Everton Park, which is in Hertfordshire, about twenty miles from London. You know that this belongs to Lord Everton, who married Miss Leyden."

"And a sweet pretty girl I thought her on her wedding-day," cried Hawkshaw. "Four such lovely brides were never to be seen before assembled in one room—and never will be seen again. By the way, what has become of the young lord's uncle—the old villain who kept him so long in captivity, deprived of his just rights?"

"He perished miserably of some incurable and excruciating malady, about six or eight months ago, on the Continent. From intelligence which

reached the Marquis of Eagledean, it appears that two bangers-on—a man named Mark Bellamy, and a woman called Mrs. Martin—clung to him until the very last. They led him a fearful life,—spending upon themselves the greater portion of the income so generously allowed by the much-injured nephew,—and leaving the old man sometimes in want of the barest necessities. However, he is gone to another world; and what has become of Bellamy and Mrs. Martin I have not heard."

"But I presume—and hope—that Lord Everton and his beautiful wife are as happy as the other couples whom you have mentioned?" said Hawkshaw.

"Equally so," responded Mr. Denison. "They have one child—a son whom they dote upon, and whom they contemplate with pride as the heir to the title and estates. Everton Park is one of the most beautiful spots in England. It was thither, as you are aware, that Frank and Elizabeth were conveyed in their childhood to see their *then* unhappy mother, the present happy Marchioness of Eagledean. Frank and the Countess of Christoval have been on a visit to the Park; and I can fancy what their feelings were when they again looked upon those scenes of which they had thus obtained a glimpse in their childhood, and which must have been associated with such mysterious memories until the secret of their birth was cleared up. Amongst your letters is one from Lord Everton—or Adolphus, as all his friends and relatives call him: it likewise contains an invitation—and as you have decided on accepting the others, you cannot refuse this."

"Nor should I think of doing so," answered Hawkshaw. "And now there remains one more couple for you to speak of."

"Mr. Deveril and Lady Florina," observed Mr. Denison. "It is just the same story with regard to them as it was in respect to the others; and if I had said at once that all the four couples at whose weddings we were present, enjoy an equal amount of felicity, I might have summed up these elaborate details in a very few words."

"Not too elaborate, my dear friend," replied Hawkshaw, "inasmuch as they are so deeply interesting. I suppose Deveril and his wife have long ago entered upon possession of the estate which the Marquis of Eagledean, Count Christoval, and Lord Everton

jointly purchased for them? And tell me, I believe, is at no great distance from Edenbridge?"

"Not above a dozen miles," answered Denison; "and it is a sweet spot. Deveril and his wife, the charming Florina, are so happy in their married state, and with their little girl—a lovely child, by the bye, just four months old—that if there be a drawback, it is only account of the life led by Florina's brother, Lord Harold Stannton."

"Ah!" ejaculated Hawkshaw, "used to like that young nobleman at times—I mean when he was staying down here at the Castle, the year before last, and when he nearly got killed by being thrown off my thoroughbred. But I am afraid he is a sad fellow."

"He is living almost openly with Lady Saxondale," responded Denison. "Nothing could be more chameleonic: a ladyship seems not merely lost to sense of decency, but to hold up her head higher in her profligacy and disgrace than she ever did when standing on the pinnacle of stainless reputation. I understand that Lord Harold Stannton is constantly at Saxondale House—though he almost lives there entirely—and though he has a lodging somewhere in the neighbourhood—decently's last name as it may be called—yet that he more frequently sleeps at Saxondale House than at his own abode. Consider what an example for a son, to be the constant companion of his own mother's acknowledged paramour!"

"It is shocking," observed Hawkshaw, then, after a little hesitation, he inquired, "Has anything more been heard of Juliana?"

"Ah! by the bye," ejaculated Denison, "I have not seen you since the dreadful exposure which was recently published in the English newspaper translated from the French—I mean the startling discovery that Juliana's husband who passed as the Count of Toledo, was none other than a notorious Spanish bandit Ramon de Caceres."

"I also read that statement," observed Hawkshaw; "and I must say that I somewhat pitied the unfortunate young lady, notwithstanding her vicious conduct towards me. Is it known who has become of her?"

"I have not heard," responded Mr. Denison. "Heavens! what a family it is! The only one who has turned

out well, is Constant the Marchioness of Villebelle; and it was altogether by flying in her mother's face and bestowing her hand where her heart was already given, that she has thus prospered. Her very disobedience has therefore been the source of her good fortune,—which almost proves that to be undutiful to such a mother was to be on the safe side."

"Did you fear anything, when in London, of Lord Saxondale himself?"

"Only that he has become so dissipated as to be well nigh past redemption, even if he had any friend who would undertake the task of reforming him. He drinks deeply; and, it is believed, never goes to bed sober. I do not suppose that his mother would care very much if he were to drink himself to death; as I fancy that in this case, if he should have attained his majority, the great bulk of the property—if not all—would still remain with her; but I do not exactly know how this is."

"It was a shocking occurrence—the death of his wife," observed Mr. Hawkshaw. "You remember that accident took me to the spot at the time of the dreadful tragedy; and the unfortunate young man was very much afflicted. By the bye, if I recollect aright, he will be of age in the course of a few days. I heard one of the tenants saying so yesterday morning; and the man was wondering whether there would be any festivities at the Castle. But it would appear that no instructions have been received to make preparations for the reception of the family; and therefore I suppose no rejoicings are to take place."

At this point of the conversation, Mr. Denison and Mr. Hawkshaw reached a spot where the road turned off towards Gainsborough in one direction, and whence there was a bye-lane leading by a circuitous route to the former gentleman's residence in another direction. Here therefore they parted; and the Squire continued his way towards the town. Finding that he was a little behind his time for the appointment which he had to keep, he turned out of the road in order to take a short cut across the fields; and in so doing, he drew near to the river's banks, at no great distance from Saxondale Castle. There had recently been a flood, caused by the heavy rains, which had made the Trent overflow and inundate the adjacent fields to a very considerable extent,—thereby causing much damage. The bailiff of the

Saxondale estate had consequently deemed it necessary to heighten the bank in the particular place where the swollen river had poured its surplus upon the meadows; and several labourers were now busily engaged on this work.

As Mr. Hawkshaw drew near the place just alluded to, it struck him that he beheld some sensation amongst the labourers—five or six of whom were grouped in a particular spot, and appeared to be occupied in the examination of something which they were passing from one to another. The moment they saw the Squire, they rushed towards him,—the foremost carrying a pistol,—while their ejaculations at once afforded a clue to the comprehension of the excitement which animated them.

"This is the thing that did the deed!" exclaimed one.

"There can be no doubt of it!—double-barrelled!" cried another.

"Who knows but what it will all be found out now?" remarked a third. "Poor creatures! it was a shocking murder!"

"Here, sir!" exclaimed the man who carried the pistol, and who now presented it to Mr. Hawkshaw: "this has just been found in the river."

But scarcely had he thus spoken, when another labourer came rushing towards the spot, carrying in his hands something which appeared to be a bundle of clothes tied round with a cord; but the package was covered with mud, and the water was dripping out of it.

urveying, that I have gleaned the damning truth. That pistol sent the unfortunate victims to the other world; and those were the garments worn by the murderer at the time. I understand that, Denison! But, my God! what a blow for the relatives of the wretched assassin!"

"Speak, Hawkshaw!" exclaimed Mr. Denison: "who is he? You evidently know him——"

"And you, also, my dear friend," added the Squire, profoundly distressed.

"He is——"

"Who?"

"Lord Harold Staunton!"

Mr. Denison staggered as if smitten violently with a hammer: he became pale as death—and sinking upon a seat, murmured, Heavens, the poor Marquis and Florina! Lady Macdonald too—it is frightful!"

"Frightful indeed!" said Hawkshaw: and the two friends exchanged looks of indescribable horror.

"But are you sure?" exclaimed Mr. Denison, catching at the hope that the Squire might possibly be deceived. "Are you certain that you may not be mistaken?"

"No, my dear friend—the truth is indeed but too apparent. Listen—and I will give you all requisite explanations. I comprehend everything as plainly as if the murderer's confession were made, and the hideous details were still ringing in our ears. Circumstances which were quite another complexion at the time, now reveal themselves in their true light. But if—as there is every reason to suspect—that vile woman was herself an accomplice——"

"Who?" demanded Mr. Denison, hurriedly.

"Lady Saxondale," replied Hawkshaw. "But let me give you the promised explanations. That pistol belonged to Lord Harold Staunton. One day I went up to the room which he occupied at the Castle: he was busy preparing his fishing-tackle—and I lingered a little while to converse with him. Accident led me to examine his pistol-case, which was made to contain two—but one only was there: the other was missing. I looked at the one which was left. I remember commenting upon its workmanship: I observed the maker's name—and I remarked that it was a celebrated one. This pistol which lies before you, Denison, is the exact fellow to the one which I then saw!"

"Good heavens!—then there is no doubt!" said the old gentleman, shuddering.

"Alas! not the slightest," rejoined Hawkshaw. "And now I bethink me, there was something very singular in Staunton's manner throughout that conversation—I remember too that at one moment——Ah! it was when I observed that he was doubtless a good shot—he became so deadly pale, and his countenance suddenly wore so ghastly a look, that I grew terrified on his account. I however attributed those appearances to his recent accident: but that accident itself, Denison, I now feel convinced was an intentional one——Yes, I comprehend it all!"

"Do you mean the accident with your thorough-bred?"

"I do. Heavens! what a deeply laid project! with what demon-like artifice was the whole plan arranged! Do you not fathom my meaning? The wretched young man threw himself from the horse in order that he might obtain a sufficient plea and excuse for keeping his own chamber. Thus was the opportunity afforded for committing the crime: while the very fact that he was believed to be stretched upon a bed of illness, was of course calculated to avert even the very possibility of suspicion from himself. On that fatal night, therefore, he must have stolen forth from the Castle——"

"But how?" inquired Denison, experiencing a fearful and likewise bewildering interest in these explanations.

"How?" echoed Hawkshaw. "Was it not proven to us, a short time after the very tragedy itself, that Staunton knew full well how to obtain secret ingress to the Castle? That tree which grows up from the river's bed, and the branches of which spread against the windows of the tapestry-chamber——"

"Ah! and where his kerchief was discovered," ejaculated Denison. "Then you think that on the fatal night of the murder, he must have stolen forth from his chamber—he must have passed out of the Castle by that window——"

"No doubt of it," replied Hawkshaw. "It is equally clear that these were the garments which he wore on the occasion. He must have waded through the stream, under the Castle wall—his clothes were therefore wet and muddy—they would have served as evidence, or at least would have engendered strange suspicions, if seen in that state by any of the domestics. Is it not therefore clear

enough, that in order to cause all traces of his dread crime to disappear, on his return to the Castle, these garments were tied up in a bundle and were doubtless thrown from one of the windows overlooking the river? The current has since carried the package higher up towards Gainsborough, notwithstanding the weight of the stone placed inside for the purpose of sinking it. As for the pistol, you yourself, Denison, suggested a long while ago—when that masquerading dress was brought to us—that the pistol should be searched for. I remember well the words you used at the time. You described the several influences under which a murderer throws away his weapon: first, that nothing criminatory may be found upon him, if suddenly stopped and searched—secondly, in the awful feeling of horror which naturally succeeds the commission of a crime—and thirdly, on being alarmed by the sound of voices or footsteps. Now, we well know that Lord Eagledean and Mr. Deveril were upon the spot almost immediately after the shots were fired; and therefore it may have been under any one of those influences—or all combined—that the wretched assassin flung his weapon into the Trent. In a word, there can be no doubt that this assassin was none other than Lord Harold Staunton, and it remains for us to decide what course we have to adopt.”

Hawkshaw then explained the circumstances under which the pistol and the clothes came into his possession, and which are already known to the reader.

“That this foul murder was committed by Lord Harold Staunton,” said Mr. Denison, “there can be no possible doubt after everything you have told me. That Lady Saxondale was his accomplice, is likewise to be presumed—though we are still totally in the dark as to the reason which could have prompted so fearful a crime. With these motives however we have nothing to do: it is with facts that we have to deal. What course can we take, Hawkshaw? On the one hand, if, being cognizant of a crime, we fail to give up the criminal to justice, we offend not merely against the laws, but likewise against that community of which we are members. But on the other hand, our friendship for the Marquis of Eagledean, and for all who are connected with the miserable murderer, prompts us to take some other

steps. I confess that I am at a loss—I know not what counsel to proffer.”

“It may be,” replied Hawkshaw, “that the Marquis of Eagledean will decide, if appealed to, that the law must take its course.”

“Then let the appeal be made to him,” cried Denison; “and we shall both stand acquitted of any breach of friendship or any undue severity in the matter. This is the best course to be adopted; and you, my dear friend, must set off without delay to see the Marquis of Eagledean. The evidences of the crime you can bear with you; and then you will let us circumstances shall suggest.”

“Yes,” responded the Squire, after a few moments’ reflection: “the plan you have marked out is the best.”

CHAPTER CLXX.

FURTHER UNRAVELMENT OF THE TANGLED SKELIN.

It was about one o’clock in the afternoon of the following day, that Mr. Hawkshaw arrived at Edenbridge Park. The Marquis and Marchioness were at home; and both were much concerned on account of the severe illness of a domestic whom they much valued. The reader will recollect a certain Mrs. Jameson, of whom mention was made at the time the Marquis went to Rhavadergwy for the purpose of presenting himself to the object of his life’s love—Lady Everton at that time—but who had since become his wife. Mrs. Jameson had long been in her ladyship’s service: she was now exceedingly old, and was stretched upon a bed of sickness from which it was feared she would never rise again. The Marquis and Marchioness were however employing all available human means to restore her. The surgeon who had been called in from the town of Edenbridge, had advised that a consultation should take place with some eminent London physician; and the Marquis had left it to the medical attendant to use his own discretion in respect to the practitioner whose aid was to be thus invoked. It happened that the Edenbridge surgeon was well acquainted with Dr. Ferney,—to whom he accordingly sent a pressing letter beseeching

to come down to the Park. Ferney, though making it a general rule not visit patients at any considerable distance from London—did not consider self very well able to refuse compliance with so urgent an appeal; and he accordingly set off for the Park. He had been many minutes at the mansion, on Mr. Hawkshaw, arriving by the train from London, likewise reached destination.

The Edenbridge surgeon and Dr. Ferney were consulting together upon invalid's case: the Marchioness was in room of the invalid herself: the visquis was alone in a parlour, when Hawkshaw was announced. His lordship at once saw by the Squire's manner that something of unusual importance had occurred; and Hawkshaw, with no more preface words than were sufficient to introduce so distressing subject, proceeded to explain to the visquis of Engledean all those particulars with which the reader has been so acquainted in the previous chapter. His lordship was for some minutes overwhelmed with horror and consternation. He knew that his nephew was versed to the very lips in all kinds of fligaries; he knew likewise that Harold at one time plotted against his life: he had never suspected that his amiable nephew was already a blood-stained murderer. The intelligence therefore, though judiciously prefaced and delicately announced, filled Lord Engledean with the most horrible feelings; he indeed it was no wonder that for ten minutes he was totally unable to utterance to a word. Profoundly moved the good-hearted Squire commiserate noble friend; and he was more than satisfied with himself for having adopted this course of first of all communicating with his lordship ere taking any extreme measure upon his responsibility.

"My dear Hawkshaw," said the visquis, at length breaking silence, speaking in a broken and tremulous voice,—at the same time that he took the Squire's hand, and pressed it with convulsive nervousness,—“you and Denison have acted most generously. That vile young man!—Good heavens! is it possible that he should be deeply stained with guilt? Accursed Lady Saxondale!—for she it is who thus urged him on step by step from a crime to another. Ah! my dear friend, I can now give you some

explanations which will help to clear up whatsoever mystery still envelops that horrible tragedy, so far as you are acquainted with it. The masquerade-dress, of the discovery of which you told me a long time ago, was worn by Lady Saxondale on a particular night, when she had an appointment with my wretched nephew,—the object of that appointment being to incite him to a duel with William Deveril. It has all along been evident that this dress fell into the hands of Emily Archer the ballet-dancer, who was the mistress of Edmund Saxondale. We may therefore surmise that she gleaned enough information on the point to be enabled to use that dress as a means of extortion or coercion with regard to Lady Saxondale. And now, Hawkshaw, you can understand wherefore her ladyship had so deep an interest in clearing her path of the unfortunate ballet-dancer. I confess there have been times, ever since you mentioned the discovery of that masquerade-dress sometime back,—and which discovery proved that it was this particular costume which the women had with them in the parcel on the evening of the murder,—there have been times, I say, when distant suspicions have flitted through my mind, that Lady Saxondale might possibly have not been altogether a stranger to the foul assassination of those victims. But still there was no positive evidence to justify such a thought: and at all events I never for a moment fancied that my wretched nephew could have been implicated in the tragedy. I knew that he was stretched upon his bed at the time; and never for an instant did it occur to me that his indisposition was feigned for the purpose of enabling him to commit, with all the greater ease and security, so execrable a crime. However, it is, alas! but too apparent *now* that such has been the real truth; and I am well nigh broken-hearted at the thought.”

“Your lordship indeed requires all your fortitude,” said Hawkshaw, profoundly moved by the spectacle of his noble friend's affliction. “Ah! I do indeed comprehend, from all that you have just said, how it was that Lady Saxondale might have had the strongest possible motives for the perpetration—or rather the instigation of so foul a deed. But what, my lord, is to be done? As yet no exposure has taken place. The incidents which I have been relating to you, are known only to Denison and

myself. Rest assured that our friendship towards yourself and all connected with you, shall over-ride every other consideration, if you so will it. Should you decide upon maintaining silence in respect to this dreadful discovery, for the sake of the amiable Florina and the kind-hearted Lady Macdonald, you have but to say the word. It will be easy for me to return into Lincolnshire and say something to those labouring men which will give them to understand that the clue which I at one moment fancied to be obtained, has not turned out to be the right one."

"Hawkshaw, whatever may occur," responded the Marquis, "I never can forget this kindness on your part, and that of my friend Denison. I scarcely feel myself justified in allowing selfish considerations to outweigh the sense of duty which we all owe to the law and to society at large. But yet there are the gravest motives—yes, the gravest——"

The Marquis stopped short, and walked abruptly towards the window, where he remained for some minutes wrapped up in the deepest thought. He envisaged all that must occur if justice should be allowed to take its course. That Lady Saxondale was not merely the accomplice but the instigatrix of the crime, was beyond the possibility of doubt. If therefore Lord Harold Staunton were arrested for the murder, *her* guilt must inevitably transpire. And then, what would be the feelings of William Deveril? Should he, after having made such noble sacrifices to save his mother from exposure, shame, and ruin,—should he be now compelled to see her held up to a world's execration for a crime even still more terrible than that from the consequences of which he had striven to shield her? Should he be forced to behold his mother plunged into a felon's gaol—dragged before a public tribunal—and ultimately sent out of the world by the hand of the executioner? Oh! the Marquis but too well knew that all this would break the generous heart of Florina's husband—that Florina herself would sink down prematurely to the grave—and that thus the crimes of the guilty would redound with horrible effect upon the heads of the innocent. These were the reflections which passed through the mind of the Marquis of Eagledean.

But there were other considerations which he had likewise to take into account. During the fourteen or fifteen months which had now elapsed since William Deveril discovered that he was in reality the son of Lady Saxondale he had occasionally called upon her in Park Lane: she had always received him alone—she had lavished upon him caresses which appeared the tenderest and the most affectionate; and he loved her notwithstanding all the past. He was ignorant that Lord Harold Staunton was her almost avowed paramour. Married as he was to Staunton's sister, no one whom he met—not even the most casual acquaintances—would so far outrage delicacy as to make the slightest allusion to such a circumstance. He therefore hoped and believed that his mother Lady Saxondale was now leading a quiet and respectable life; and thus he had no hesitation in visiting her from time to time, as above described. Of course Florina knew not that he ever went to Saxondale House: she had continued ignorant of the tremendous secret of his birth—a secret now known but to himself, Lady Saxondale, the Marquis of Eagledean, and Angela (Francis Paton's wife). But even supposing that the discovery which Hawkshaw had come to Edenbridge Park to announce, should be hushed up and buried in silence,—how was it possible that the Marquis of Eagledean could suffer the pure-minded and virtuous William Deveril to go on visiting his mother—a murderess? No: there was something terrific in such a course—something outrageous to every proper sentiment—something against which every feeling of propriety revolted. Then what was, he to do? This question kept agitating in his lordship's mind, as he stood deliberating at the window. There really seemed to be only this plan:—that the veil of secrecy should still be kept drawn over the tremendous guilt of Lady Saxondale and Lord Harold Staunton, so far as exposure to the world was continued; but that measures must be adopted to force Lady Saxondale to go abroad, and *for ever*—so that no more interviews should take place between herself and her lawfully born offspring, William Deveril. As for Staunton, he likewise must be compelled to depart to some distant clime, with a warning that his

only hope of safety lay in making this self-expatriation eternal.

Such were the resolves to which the Marquis of Eagledean came: but while explaining them to Mr. Hawkshaw, he did not of course make the slightest allusion to the fact that William Deveril was Lady Saxondale's son.

"My dear friend," he said, "I accept the alternative which your noble generosity and that of Mr. Denison has left open. There are too many on whose innocent heads the effect of all this guilt would terrifically redound, to permit an exposure to take place. The veil of secrecy must not therefore be lifted from that dark tragedy. But at the same time, if we forbear from handing over the criminals to the grasp of the law, we must not suffer them to escape without some chastisement. We must force them into exile, to different parts of the world—with the warning that all this forbearance will cease if they ever set foot upon the English soil again. Come, my friend—we will depart for London: we will go together and see these guilty beings—I hope for the last time!"

Mr. Hawkshaw expressed his readiness to accompany the Marquis, and indeed to yield to his views in every particular. While refreshments were served up to the Squire, Lord Eagledean sought the Marchioness in order to inform her that business of a somewhat urgent nature, in which his friend Hawkshaw was concerned, was about to take him to London, and that he should not probably return until the following day. Meanwhile the consultation between Dr. Ferney and the Edenbridge surgeon had terminated the physician had recommended the mode of treatment which was the best for adoption in respect to the invalid—and he was now about to take his departure. As a matter of course, the Marquis offered him a seat in his own carriage to the railway station, which Dr. Ferney accepted. The physician thus became a fellow-traveller with Lord Eagledean and Mr. Hawkshaw to London: for when the station was reached, the Marquis could not possibly express a desire to separate from Dr. Ferney's society in the train,—though in his heart he would much rather have travelled alone with Mr. Hawkshaw. In about an hour and a half the metropolis was reached; and as they were all three going to the West end, they took a vehicle at the terminus. The

conversation had all the while been upon indifferent topics—so that Ferney had not the slightest idea whether his two travelling-companions were actually bound. Conduit Street, where the physician dwelt, was all in the way towards Park Lane: the driver of the vehicle therefore received orders first of all to proceed to Dr. Ferney's dwelling. In due time this destination was reached; and the physician alighted at his own door. As she was about to take leave, it occurred to him that having been most liberally treated by the Marquis in respect to the amount of the fee placed in his hand immediately after the consultation at Edenbridge Park,—he was bound for courtesy's sake to offer some little apology for what might appear a most rude neglect on his part in respect to a certain matter, but which he had his own good reasons for having hitherto so long remained silent upon.

He was standing on the curb-stone, looking into the vehicle where the Marquis and Hawkshaw remained seated. Hands had been shaken, and farewells said—when that thought to which we have just alluded, occurred to the physician. It was a most disagreeable—a most painful topic, for him to touch upon; it revived so many afflicting associations;—but still he felt himself bound, in common courtesy, to say a word upon the subject; and he summoned up all his fortitude for the purpose.

"My lord," he said, "I have not forgotten that a long, long time ago you honoured me with a call, and brought me a phial the contents of which you requested me to analyze. On three or four occasions after that, your lordship called again, to inquire whether I had made the analysis; and I feel ashamed when I reflect that I continuously answered I had not as yet found time. Your lordship suddenly ceased from calling altogether; and during the lengthy interval which has passed since then, I have often feared you might have felt offended with me. When therefore I received the letter inviting me to Edenbridge, I was gratified by the thought that your lordship was not angry—"

"No, Dr. Ferney," interrupted the Marquis of Eagledean; "I had ceased to think of the matter:"—though the real truth was that after the discovery of William Deveril's parentage,

his lordship had taken no farther step to penetrate any deeper into Lady Saxondale's guilt. "I can assure you I have not been offended; and as the interest attached to that phial has passed away, you need not suffer it to remain for another moment in your thoughts. And now farewell."

"Farewell, my lord," answered Dr. Ferney. "Can I tell the driver whither he is to convey you?"

"To Saxondale House, in Park Lane," responded the Marquis.

The mention of that name, so closely following upon the discourse relative to the phial of poison, struck the physician as something not merely accidental, but superstitiously portentous. It gave a most poignant keenness to all the memories which had just been excited in his brain: the effect produced upon him was that of a sudden shock; he started—turned deadly pale—and then stood gazing in a species of ghastly consternation upon the Marquis of Eagledean.

"Heavens! are you ill, Dr. Ferney?" exclaimed the nobleman, who, as well as Hawkshaw, was astonished and affrighted by the physician's looks.

"Yes—I am ill—I—I feel—very ill," gasped Ferney, scarcely knowing what he said, and actually experiencing the most sickening sensations.

"Ill, my kind benefactor! my best of friends!" exclaimed an old man, who happened to come up to the spot at the moment, after having been for his usual little walk; and just as he was about to ascend the front door-steps, he caught those words which fell from Dr. Ferney's lips. "Let me support you!"

"Never mind, Thompson—I am better now," said the physician, suddenly rallying and regaining his self-possession.

"Thompson?" ejaculated the Marquis of Eagledean, who, though the name was a common one enough, never heard it mentioned without thinking of the individual who, if he were found could doubtless throw so much light upon William Deveril's early history. "Did you say this gentleman's name was Mr. Thompson?"

"Yes, my lord," answered Ferney, astonished at the question,—as was also Thompson himself, and even Hawkshaw too: for it certainly seemed a very strange one, the motive for putting it not being apparent.

"I am sure you will pardon me, Mr. Thompson," said the Marquis, "for the seeming discourtesy of my behaviour:

but I have vowed that whenever I meet any one bearing your name, and being of a certain age, I would not fail to put a particular query. I have no doubt that I shall receive from you the same answer. I have already had from a dozen other Mr. Thompsons to whom I have addressed myself on the subject. But nevertheless I shall take this liberty with you."

"This is the Marquis of Eagledean—and that is his friend Mr. Hawkshaw," said Ferney to Thompson, who accordingly bowed in acknowledgment of the introductions.

"Your lordship can take no liberty," said Thompson: "and therefore whatsoever question you may have to put to me, shall be readily answered."

"It is a simple one," rejoined the Marquis, really attaching but little importance to the incident: for the antipodes are not farther from each other, than from his imagination was the hope that his query would elicit the response it was destined to meet. "Again I must ask you to excuse my freedom: indeed the question itself may savour of impertinence; but I can assure you it is through no illegitimate curiosity I ask if you were ever at any period of your life connected with theatricals?"

"Most assuredly I was, my lord," answered Thompson.

"You were?" ejaculated the Marquis, starting as if galvanized, "But one word more!" he added, with a feverish excitement which astonished those who beheld it. "Were you ever yourself the manager of a company of performers?"

"I was, my lord," rejoined Thompson.

"You were? Question begets question!" exclaimed Lord Eagledean. "Excuse me, but were you acquainted with a family named Deveril?"

"I know them well, my lord," was the response, given with increasing astonishment on the part of Thompson and in which Hawkshaw and Ferney both naturally shared.

"A man and his wife—with a boy and girl," continued the Marquis, with rapid and excited utterance,—"the girl named Angela—the boy William —"

"To be sure! the very same!" ejaculated Thompson. "But the boy was not really their son—I have been questioned about this before—by a

woman named Madge Somers—who was murdered, I think I heard——”

“Enough, enough, Mr. Thompson!” cried the Marquis. “Another time—to-morrow—or presently—I will come and have some conversation with you.”

“Dear me, my lord!” said Thompson, more and more surprised at all that was taking place; “I hope there’s nothing amiss. As for the boy I am speaking of—he must be a young man now—he had the mark of a strawberry on his shoulder——”

“What?” ejaculated Ferney, once more becoming deadly pale—and once more too staggering back as if seized with a sudden indisposition. “Good heavens! is every thing about to transpire?”—and these words, quite involuntarily spoken, were uttered with as indescribable anguish and terror.

“I see,” said the Marquis at once convinced that Ferney himself had something important which he could communicate, and that there was likewise something more serious and significant than sudden indisposition when he had turned so ghastly pale at the mention of the name of Saxondale,—“I see that I must have some immediate conversation with you both Hawkshaw, my dear friend, excuse me if I may now appear to be treating you with a want of confidence: but——”

“No apologies, my dear Marquis,” said the Squire. “I am well aware that whatever you do is for the best.”

Lord Eagledean alighted from the vehicle; and Dr. Ferney requested the Squire to enter the house, observing that whatsoever private discourse had to be held might take place in another room: but even as he spoke, the physician’s manner was still strangely confused—he trembled nervously—and the ghastliness of pallor seemed to have settled itself immovably upon his countenance. They all entered the dwelling together: Mr. Hawkshaw was shown into the room—while the Marquis of Eagledean accompanied Dr. Ferney and Thompson to another. We shall leave the Squire to the astonishment into which all these proceedings naturally flung him; and we shall see what took place between the other three.

Dr. Ferney sank, like one thoroughly exhausted both in mind and body, upon a sofa. The fortitude which had so long upheld him in the maintenance of Lady Saxondale’s various secrets, appeared altogether to have given way:

he looked like a man who felt that the time destined by heaven itself for the fullest revelations, had now come—as if the veil of mystery which had so long shrouded the past, was to be drawn aside by the invisible hand of Providence itself. He was thoroughly crushed and spirit broken: remorse for the part which he had enacted in suffering himself to be made the tool of that wily woman, seized upon his soul: his sensation was that of a guilty person who feels that the hour has come when penitence must ensue and atonement be made;—and under such influences as these, the spell of that very infatuation which now for twenty-one long years had bound him to the image of Lady Saxondale, was itself well nigh broken. At all events the talisman had lost its hitherto marvellous power: he had a conscience on which there rested a heavy load—and he longed to ease himself thereof.

Both Thompson and the Marquis of Eagledean saw that Dr. Ferney was painfully agitated—that bitter feelings were torturing his soul and they scarcely knew what conjecture to form as to the precise cause of so much trouble. Thompson especially,—who had lived with the physician for the last eighteen months,—was more astonished than even the Marquis: because he knew how pure and upright was the tenour of his benefactor’s existence—he had looked upon him only as the slave of science—he could scarcely fancy it possible that he had ever committed a crime!

“Dr. Ferney—and you also, Mr. Thompson,” said the Marquis of Eagledean, addressing them both in a solemn manner,—“the finger of heaven is visible in the incidents which have taken place within the last few minutes. It seemed destined that I was to mention the name of Saxondale in order to excite some particular feeling in *your* breast, Dr. Ferney: it seemed too, Mr. Thompson, that I was simultaneously thrown in *your* way in order to receive from your lips those statements which you evidently have it in your power to make in respect to a young gentleman who is known to the world as William Deveril.”

“For my part, my lord,” at once responded Thompson, “I have not the slightest interest in making any concealment—especially as I am even now ignorant of the use or value which the details I am enabled to communicate,

may prove to you. Indeed, all I know is this:—that many long years ago I was with my company of performers in one of the Midland Counties. Amongst that company were a young couple of the name of Deveril,—a steady, well-behaved respectable pair—an exception indeed to the general rule with regard to the profession which circumstances had compelled them to embrace. One day they were walking out together in the neighbourhood of some town in a Midland County—I forget exactly which at this moment—when they were struck by the appearance of an elderly gipsy woman, who had a beautiful baby in her arms. The child was about four months old; and though so sweetly pretty, looked sickly and delicate: it was more-over clad in rags. The Deverils stopped and spoke to the woman—who received them, indeed, to solicit alms. They saw at once that the child was not of the gipsy-race: for its complexion was perfectly fair. They felt assured it had been stolen and was now carried about in the arms of a mendicant for the purpose of exciting sympathy. They questioned the gipsy very closely; and the tale which she told, seemed too round-about and too full of prevarications to be consistent with truth. She vowed that she had received the child from another gipsy woman who was a perfect stranger to her—that this other gipsy woman had told her she had got the child a few weeks back from a gang of tramps of her own race, but with whom she had likewise been previously unacquainted. Whether true or whether false, the narrative afforded the Deverils no clue to the discovery of the unfortunate child's parents. In their indignation at the thought that the poor little innocent might have possibly been torn away from a comfortable home, they made for a some threatening language to the elderly gipsy woman—to the effect that there were laws and authorities to compel her to give a more satisfactory account than she had done of the way in which she became possessed of that infant. Either being really alarmed—or else having had the child already along enough upon her hands—the gipsy suddenly laid the infant down on the grass by the road-side, and darted away as fast as her legs could carry her. Considering that she was an elderly person, she sped at an astonishing rate; and

though Deveril pursued her, so soon as he recovered from the astonishment into which the suddenness of that proceeding had thrown him, he could not overtake her. He lost her amidst a maze of lanes leading out from the high road where the occurrence took place, and it is therefore probable that while he was pursuing one direction, she had plunged into some bye-path in another. When he retraced his way to the spot where he had left his wife, he found her seated on the bank with the child in her arms. Your lordship can guess the sequel. The Deverils were generous hearted though poor; and they resolved to adopt the unfortunate infant that had thus been thrown in their way. They gave it their own surname of Deveril, and the Christian name of William. A year afterwards they had a child of their own; and of such angelic beauty was she, that they called her Angela. Not for a moment however did they think of renouncing the task they had imposed upon themselves of rearing the little William,—whom indeed they loved as much as if he had in reality been their own son. They were not less intelligent and considerate than they were kind-hearted: they accordingly resolved to bring up William with the idea that he was in truth their own offspring, until he should reach the age of manhood;—and to this resolution they came in order that as he himself grew up, he should not have his sensitive feelings wounded by being compelled to regard himself as an interloper in the bosom of that poor and humble family.

Besides, they did not wish the tenderest years of his life to be saddened and disturbed by the knowledge that he had been torn from his own legitimate parents;—and thus was it for the poor boy's sake that he was brought up to consider himself as the son of those who from mere charity had adopted him. I esteemed the Deverils: I was on terms of intimacy with them, apart from being their employer in the dramatic profession;—and they confided all their motives and plans to me. Now, my lord, I have told you everything with which I am acquainted on this subject: but I may repeat what I ere now said in the street, that the child who was so adopted had the tiny mark of a strawberry just in this part where the neck joins the shoulder."

Thus speaking, Mr. Thompson indicated on his own person the spot to

which he alluded with regard to William Deveril. The Marquis had listened with the profoundest attention and interest:—Dr. Ferney, with his countenance buried in his hands, had not appeared to listen at all: but he nevertheless had lost not a single word of everything Thompson had been saying; and he suddenly raised his eyes at the very instant that Thompson indicated the place where the strawberry-mark on William Deveril's shoulder would be found.

"Yes, yes—it was there too that I —"

He had ejaculated those words with a startling abruptness as she sprang up to his feet: but suddenly stopping short, without finishing the sentence, he placed his hand upon his brow, and sank back again on the sofa with an expression of ineffable anguish sweeping over his features.

"Dr. Ferney," said the Marquis of Eagledean, approaching the physician, and speaking in a voice of the deepest solemnity, "whatever you have to make known, I adjure you to reveal it, in the name of that Providence which has brought about the incidents of the hour that is passing?"

"Do you, my lord," inquired the physician, "know that William—Deveril the lost child whom the poor players adopted?"

"I do," responded the Marquis. "He is married to my own niece: and what is more, I am acquainted with the real truth of his parentage."

"Ah, I understand it all! I comprehend it now!" ejaculated the miserable Ferney, literally writhing in mortal anguish. "But heaven knows that when I lent myself as that lady's instrument, I suspected not for what purpose it was to serve! My lord—and you, Mr. Thompson—you behold before you the man who perverted his scientific skill to the consummation of a fearful imposture: but I repeat—yes, solemnly I repeat, that I knew not at the time the iniquity I was assisting to consummate!"

"What mean you?" demanded the Marquis.

"I mean, my lord," responded Ferney, who felt as if some irresistible influence was now urging him to make the revelation,—“I mean that this right hand of mine formed upon the neck of him who now bears the tittle of Lord Saxondale, a peculiar mark—a mark of which the description was

most accurately given to me—the mark of a strawberry!"

Having made this confession, Ferney once more sank down upon the sofa, a prey to feelings which may be better imagined than described. The Marquis stood transfixed in amazement: while an ejaculation expressive of a similar sentiment burst from the lips of Thompson.

"Yes—it was I who did it!" suddenly exclaimed Ferney, as he again sprang up from the sofa: and now there was a sort of maniac wildness in his looks and his manner. "Oh! truly have you observed, my lord, that the finger of heaven is visible in all this!—and I feel—yes, I feel that this is indeed the day for retribution. Not another hour—not another unnecessary minute shall be wasted, ere wrong shall give place to right! Be the consequences to me what they may, I will do justice where justice ought to be done!"

It was with all the vehemence of the wildest emotions—with all the impassioned excitement of feelings painfully worked up—that the physician had given vent to that hurricane of words: and while their last echoes were still vibrating through the air, he rushed like one frenzied from the room.

"Stop, Dr. Ferney—stop! I entreat—I command you!" cried the Marquis of Eagledean, now suddenly rendered keenly alive to the dreadful consequences of exposure in respect to Lady Saxondale.

But the physician heard him not—or at least heeded him not: but precipitating himself in frantic haste down the stairs, he rushed forth from the house. The vehicle was still waiting at the door: he sprang into it—and gave a hurried direction to the driver, who at once whipped his horse; and away flew the cab in the direction of Park lane.

The Marquis of Eagledean rushed down the strairs after the physician—but reached the threshold of the front door only in time to catch a glimpse of the vehicle as it was dashing away. For the driver, judging by Ferney's excitement, and knowing him to be a physician, conceived that some life and death affair was concerned: he accordingly failed not to play his whip and chose not to spare his horse.

"Good heavens! my lord," said Thompson, who had followed the Marquis down to the street-door, "what

will ensue? what will be the consequences?"

"My dear friend, what is all this?" cried Hawkshaw, now rushing forth from the parlour, where he had been waiting, and from the window of which he had observed the physician's egress—which had every appearance of a flight in wildest terror.

But Lord Eagledean could not answer either of his querists: he was overwhelmed with consternation at the thought that the fullest exposure must now inevitably take place,—and that all William Deveril's forbearance—all his hopes of saving his mother from shame and ruin—would in a few minutes become as naught. At that instant an unoccupied cab passed along the street; and the man who drove it, perceiving three gentlemen standing on the threshold of the hall-door, held up his hand in the usual mode of hailing for a fare.

"We may yet be in time to prevent it!" ejaculated the Marquis; and beckoning an affirmative to the cab-driver, he rushed down the steps.

Hawkshaw and Thomposen followed him mechanically; and the next moment they were all three seated in the vehicle.

"Where to, gentleman?" demanded the driver.

"To Saxondale House in Park Lane," was Lord Eagledean's hurried and excited response: then, as the vehicle drove rapidly away, he said to Hawkshaw, "My dear friend, whatever be the result of the present proceeding, it were wrong—it were ungenerous—to keep you in the dark as to its meaning: for Mr. Thompson, who is seated next to you, can tell you, even if my lips uttered it not, that William Deveril is the true and rightful Lord Saxondale!"

"The Squire literally bounded upon his : but we must leave the Marquis to him the few hurried explanations in the short space that was occupied in the drive to Park Lane permitted, while we transport the reader to Saxondale House itself.

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CHAPTER CLXXI.

THE BIRTH DAY.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon—about an hour previous to the scenes at Dr. Ferney's house—

that several persons were assembled in the State Drawingroom at Saxondale House. These were Lady Saxondale—Juliana—Edmund—Lord Harold Staunton—Lord Petersfield—and Messrs. Marlow and Malton.

This was the day on which, according to the baptismal certificate, the heir of Saxondale attained his twenty first year!

It was therefore a day of business,—to be succeeded with festivities in the evening. The table in the State Drawingroom where the assembly had gathered, was covered with parchments, deeds, and documents: the time had arrived when the guardianship of Lord Petersfield and Marlow and Malton was to terminate—when the requisite releases were to be signed by Edmund—and when the transfers of the Saxondale property were to be duly made by the trustees.

We must glance at the demeanour and bearing of those present on the occasion. First of all, Lady Saxondale, looking eminently handsome, wore upon her countenance a certain expression of satisfaction,—which Petersfield and the lawyers regarded as a becoming maternal pride in respect to the offspring who was now entering upon the enjoyment of his estates. The reader however will scarcely require to be informed, that this expression on her ladyship's features was rather one of triumph at the success of her deeply laid schemes; for she had not the slightest fear that her own lawful and legitimate offspring—William Deveril—would breathe a syllable or raise a finger to prevent the consummation of the monstrous fraud by which he was excluded from his rights. Secondly, Edmund himself was in a fever of ecstatic joy: his dark crime was for the moment forgotten; and in the secret depths of his heart, he was thinking to himself that he should speedily again shake off the yoke which his mother had ever since the date of that foul deed succeeded in re-imposing upon him. Thirdly, Juliana looked on with an inward calmness—but with an inward exultation: for she had resolved that as the price of keeping the tremendous secret with which she was acquainted, she would extort from her mother a concession of a handsome income, which would enable her to prosecute her own pleasures after her own independent fashion. Fourthly, Lord Harold Staunton—who, as the reader is aware

knew nothing at all of the fearful deception which was being practised—had his own pleasurable feelings: for what with being Lady Saxondale's paramour, and having, as he fancied, obtained immense influence over Edmund, he saw every opportunity of continuing a life of luxurious indolence. Fifthly, Lord Petersfield looked so immensely pompous, and at the same time so awfully grave, that he seemed the very embodiment of the proudest diplomatic mystery; and if any one at the moment had dared to ask him point-blank whether he were really Lord Petersfield or not, he would doubtless have considered it his duty to fence with the question for at least half an hour ere he answered it. Sixthly, Mr. Marlow was all excitement and bustle—unfolding one paper and rolling up another—making a correction here and a memorandum there—and, in short, appearing as brisk as if he were full of quicksilver. Seventhly, his partner Mr. Malton had all the sedate business-like demeanour of a shrewd and intelligent practitioner.

These seven personages were, as we have said, gathered round the table in the State Drawing-room at about four o'clock on the day of which we are writing. Business was now to be proceeded with—to be followed by a sumptuous banquet, which was ordered for seven o'clock. The attainment of a majority under such circumstances where immense estates and revenues were concerned, was a matter of such importance as to absorb every other feeling on the part of such men as Petersfield and the lawyers. Thus, though they knew full well that Lady Saxondale and Lord Harold Staunton were much more intimate than they ought to be—though they likewise knew that Juliana's career had been far from the purest and most creditable—and though, in addition to these circumstances, they were equally aware that Edmund himself was a dissipated profligate—they did not consider the present moment to be the time to bestow cold looks, make pointed allusions, or display any particular fastidiousness on their own parts. In a word, they regarded it as a day on which the past might be put aside, for the present, and when every indulgence should be shown and every friendly feeling ought to prevail. Under these circumstances was it that those seven persons were assembled.

But just as Mr. Malton was beginning to read over the releases which Edmund had to sign, a domestic entered the room, and presented a card to Lady Saxondale—without however uttering a word. For a moment—but only for a moment—she turned pale and trembled: yet so quickly was her self-possession regained, that not a soul present observed that she had even for that single instant been thus shaken.

"I will come immediately," she said to the domestic—who bowed and retired: then addressing herself to the company, she observed with a bland smile, "It is a visitor of no consequence—but nevertheless one whom I must see for a few minutes. You can proceed, Mr. Marlow, with the reading of the release; as for my part, I am already acquainted with its contents."

She then left the room. But scarcely had the door closed behind her—scarcely did she find herself on the landing—when she was seized with a recurrence of that tremor which was so transient in the presence of the company; and as a frightful idea swept like a barbed arrow through her brain, she murmured to herself, "My God! can he have thought better of it? can he have repented of the sacrifice he had promised to make? can he mean to assert his rights? No, no—it is impossible! He loves me too well to plunge me into ruin! I have too much influence over him for that! A little cajolery—plenty of caresses—a more than usual amount of endearments—and he will be docile—he will be submissive!"

Thus buoying herself up with hope—though nevertheless not without some degree of painful suspense and poignant apprehension—Lady Saxondale repaired to the apartment to which the visitor had been shown. This visitor was none other than William Deveril. Unaware that the Marquis of Eagledean had so suddenly come up to London, our hero—having some business in the metropolis—had journeyed thither; and having terminated it sooner than he had expected, his thought that he would pay his mother a visit of a few minutes ere hastening off to the railway-station to return to his own abode. We must add that he was totally ignorant that this was the birthday of Saxondale's heir—his own birthday, by rights—but

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the benefits of which were to all appearances to be reaped by another!

Lady Saxondale entered, as we said, the apartment to which William Deveril had been shown; and with all the generous feelings of his heart—with all the enthusiastic fervour of a filial love which could even blind itself to a mother's faults—he rushed into her arms. In that gush of tenderness was the significant proof that she was safe, and that it was merely a casual visit which he had thus paid her—a visit inspired by no motive hostile to her own schemes.

"My dearest boy!" she said clasping him to her bosom, and lavishing upon him caresses which appeared the tenderest and the most fervid: "I am delighted to see you again! Would that it were possible, my beloved William,"—for by this Christian name she was accustomed to call him,—“we could meet oftener! but for many reasons you know it is impossible.”

"Alas! I know it, dearest mother," responded our hero: "and you will admit that I obey the dictates of my own feelings as little as possible. If I come to you once a month, it is the very outside——"

"You are indeed as prudent, dearest boy, as you are kind-hearted and generous towards your affectionate mother!"—and as she thus spoke, the wily woman pressed him again to her bosom. "I am so sorry, dearest William," she went on to observe, "that I have some persons on business with me at this moment: and I shall not be able to remain very long with you——"

"Never, my beloved mother," quickly responded our hero, "will I interfere with your proceedings! I will therefore depart at once—contented and happy to have embraced you; and the next time I call, perhaps you will have a little more time to devote to me."

"Rest assured that it shall be so," answered her ladyship. "But yet you shall not leave me in such a hurry. You know how I love you; and I cannot find it in my heart to hasten you away. Yes, dearest William—I love you all the more on account of your noble conduct towards me!"

"Oh! how often have I conjured you," exclaimed our hero, "not to express the slightest syllable of thanks on that account! It is a duty which I owe you; and being such, it is cheerfully performed."

"Dearest boy!" murmured Lady Saxondale, gazing upon him with every appearance of mingled tenderness and admiration. "And you are sure, William, that you have never once repented the decision to which you came—th—there have not been moments when you have regretted the sacrifice you have made——"

"Never once, mother!" cried Deveril emphatically. "No—not for a single moment!"

"And never," continued Lady Saxondale, "have you breathed in the ear of your wife——"

"No, never—not a syllable! That is the only secret which I have kept from Florina. In every other respect my heart is revealed to her as if my breast itself were transparent. Oh, dearest mother if you entertain the slightest misgiving on my account, banish it from your mind—dismiss it from your thoughts! You may confide in my good faith as implicitly as if it were an angel from heaven that gave you the assurance!"

"And all the fondest love which a mother can bear for her son, is yours! as your reward," murmured Lady Saxondale, as she bestowed upon him a parting embrace.

"Farewell, dearest mother," responded Deveril. "In a month we shall meet again."

They then separated,—Lady Saxondale returning with exultant heart to the State Drawing-room—and our hero descending the stairs to issue forth from the mansion. As he crossed the threshold of the front-door, he bade the hallporter good afternoon: and that domestic sentimentally replied, "Good afternoon, Mr. Deveril."

"Deveril?" ejaculated a middle-aged gentleman who, at the instant, having alighted from a vehicle, was hurrying up the steps. "Deveril! was that the name I heard mentioned?"—and he stopped short surveying our hero rapidly, and also in a widely excited manner.

"My name is Deveril, sir," was the response, courteously given—but likewise with some degree of astonishment at the singular behaviour of his interrogator.

"Yes—it must be!—the very age—the likeness too!" said that individual, in a quick musing tone to himself. "A word with you, if you, please, sir—a word with you! It is of the highest importance! And yet, as you are here—at Saxondale House—you must

know—But no matter! A word with you!"

"With me?" exclaimed our hero, in increasing astonishment.

"Yet—with you! Are you not William Deveril? I am Dr. Ferney—a physician whose name perhaps may not be altogether unknown to you. I have just seen the Marquis of Bagledean—and Mr. Hawkshaw——"

"Ah!" exclaimed Deveril: "is Mr. Hawkshaw in London?"

"He is. But there is another thing," Ferney went on to say, in the same hurried and excited manner: "a certain Mr. Thompson——"

"Thompson!" echoed Deveril, an intense interest now blending with his amazement.

"Yes! But we cannot converse here. Come with me!"—then addressing himself to the hall-porter, the physician said, "Have the kindness to show us to an apartment where we may converse for a few minutes."

The domestic hesitated not to comply with this command, inasmuch as the name of the eminent Ferney was well known to him: and moreover, Deveril himself was an occasional visitor at the mansion. He had caught, too, some portion of the hurried and ejaculatory exchange of observations which had just passed upon the door-steps and without understanding anything in its true sense, he saw enough to be convinced that something of importance was progressing. He therefore conducted the physician and our hero into a parlour opening from the hall: but he paused to inquire of the former whether he should announce his presence to her ladyship?

"No—not yet!—do not disturb her for the moment!" ejaculated Ferney: and he seemed all in a nervous trepidation until the domestic retired, closing the door behind him: then, still with excited utterance, he said abruptly, "What are you doing here? Tell me, quick!—tell me, I beseech you!"

"I came to call upon Lady Saxondale," was our hero's response: and he could not feel offended by the physician's questioning: on the contrary, he himself was now excited and agitated at all that was passing.

"Lady Saxondale! Wherefore speak of her thus coldly?" exclaimed Ferney. "But you do not know—it is evident you do not! You are completely in the dark! Ah! it is for me to be the first to enlighten you!"

"Good heavens, what mean you?" cried Deveril, now trembling with apprehension lest the secret which but a few minutes back he had so solemnly pledged himself to his mother to keep, should have become known to the physician: then, as he recollected that the name of Thompson was mentioned on the door-steps, he felt assured that his conjecture must be the true one.

"What do I mean?" ejaculated the excited Ferney. "Here! strip off your coat—your waistcoat—unfasten your shirt——"

"Oh, my poor mother!" murmured Deveril, as he caught the physician violently by both arms, and forced him into a chair: for it was in a sort of frenzy that Ferney had begun almost to tear our hero's raiment from his back. "Silence! compose yourself—I conjure you to compose yourself! Whatever you may know, sir, must be kept inviolable!"

"Heavens! is it possible," cried Ferney, starting up in a still wilder excitement than before, "that you yourself *do* know everything, and that you have submitted thus to be defrauded of your rights?"

"Dr. Ferney," answered our hero, "on my knees do I supplicate your forbearance—your mercy towards my—to-wards Lady Saxondale!"

"Oh, speak out the words fully! call her *your mother*!" cried the physician.

"No, no—not aloud! the very walls have ears!" murmured Deveril, with tremor in his accents, and an almost frenzied affright in his looks: but as the physician was bounding towards the door, he sprang up from his knees—flew after him—and literally hurled him back. "Sir!" he exclaimed, with all the vehemence of passion, "It is not *your* secret which you seem so madly inclined to betray! it is *mine*—and I invoke curses upon your head if you dare reveal it!"

"Ah! young man," cried the physician, growing all the more rapid in his excitement in proportion as our hero's frenzy increased,—“you may indeed invoke curses upon me: for it is I—wretch, villain that I have been—who have proved the means of depriving you of your birth-right! But wrong shall be done you no more—everything shall be proclaimed in the face of day!"

"For God's sake, spare me—spare my mother!" cried Deveril again falling upon his knees, and clasping his

lands wildly, as his arms were outstretched towards the physician.

But Ferney heeded him not: and availing himself of the opportunity to rush to the door, he flung it open—he dashed into the hall, demanding of a foot-man, “Where is your mistress? Where I ask?”—and he stamped his foot with impatience.

“In the drawing room above, sir,” responded the astounded lacquey. “But her ladyship—”

“No matter!” cried the physician and he rushed up the stairs.

William Deveril, in a state bordering upon frenzy—maddened at the thought of the shame, the ruin, the total destruction, which must overtake his mother—darted in pursuit of Dr. Ferney; while the domestic and the hallporter, who behold this singular scene, exchanged looks of perfect bewilderment, being utterly at a loss what to think.

But we must now return to the State Drawing-room, to which Lady Saxondale went back after her interview with her son. She entered with the calm composure of one who had merely received a casual visitor, of whom she had succeeded in getting rid after some twenty minutes’ conversation. She resumed her seat at the table,—motioning Mr. Marlow to continue the reading of the releases, to the end of which he had not yet got, as they were very long. He had paused for an instant out of respect for her ladyship, when she thus re-appeared: but on that sign from her, he continued the recital. Volatile, quick, and bustling, as his habits were,—he nevertheless could settle himself down on occasions into comparative sedateness; and he was now reading the details of the documents in that slow and deliberate manner which was best calculated to render the contents effective and impressive. In about ten minutes more after Lady Saxondale’s return to the room, the reading was brought to an end; and then Mr. Marlow, addressing Edmund, spoke in the following manner:—

“Your lordship has heard all the details of these releases, which you are requested to sign not merely in acquittal of the trust which has been exercised on your behalf by my Lord Petersfield and the firm to which I have the honour to belong—but likewise in evidence of satisfaction at the mode in which that trust has been carried out. Here are the deeds which are about to be handed over to your

lordship, and which will place you in full enjoyment of the domains and revenues whereunto you are entitled. Your lordship will have the goodness to sign these releases; and those papers are then your’s.”

Edmund took the paper which the solicitor presented to him, and was about to write the name of “SAXONDALÉ” on the parchment whose contents had just been read,—when Lord Petersfield, thinking it a proper opportunity for him to make a set speech, waved his hand in a dignified manner for a pause to ensure ere the business should be thus terminated.

“Permit me,” he said, looking awfully solemn, and speaking with all the gravity of the veteran diplomatist,—“permit me as the friend of your long deceased father—as the friend of your family for many, many years—as one who has beheld you grow up from infancy to that manhood which you have now attained—And I think I may venture to assert that it is really you yourself whose growth I have thus studied; and not another’s—permit me, I say, to congratulate you on the attainment of your majority—a majority which, I believe, I may add without any fear of contradiction, places you in the possession of your estates. I am not accustomed to make hurried assertions—I am not in the habit of speaking precipitately or rashly—but I think I may venture to affirm that you are the possessor of those estates—your identity is beyond dispute—and I am congratulating the legitimate, the lawful, the unmistakable—shall I say the well-proven to be heir of Saxondale?”

“No—it is false!” ejaculated a wildly speaking voice, as the door was dashed open; and Dr. Ferney, with the air of a lunatic just escaped from Bedlam, burst into the room, followed by William Deveril.

Lady Saxondale started up as if suddenly galvanized: a wild scream thrilled from her lips—and she sank senseless upon the floor. William Deveril, who had stopped short on beholding that assemblage of persons, sprang forward to catch his mother; but he was too late to prevent her from falling—and almost frantic, he snatched her up in his arms and conveyed her to a sofa.

At the same instant other hurried footsteps were heard upon the landing; and the Marquis of Eagledem,

Mr. Hawkshaw and Mr. Thompson now made their appearance upon the scene.

CHAPTER CLXXII.

THE RIGHTFUL HEIR OF SAXONDALE.

No words in the English language—nor in any known tongue—have power to convey even a faint idea of the excitement and confusion which were thus suddenly produced in that apartment. Lord Petersfield had merely dogmatized in his wonted sententious manner, without the slightest possible suspicion that while he was expatiating on Edmund's identity as the veritable heir of Saxondale, he was treading on the most ticklish ground, and that by a coincidence he was sending forth verbiage which admitted of so marked and abrupt a refutation. He sat aghast in his chair:—Malton, the sedate partner, looked astounded—Marlow, the volatile one, was all feverish excitement. Juliana comprehended that all was lost; and when Hawkshaw made his appearance, she abruptly fled from the room. Staunton was seized with an inconceivable bewilderment, which quickly became blended with a strong feeling of terror on beholding his uncle the Marquis of Eagledean. As for Edmund, he was stricken with amazement: but the next moment he felt assured that it could be nothing beyond a madman's freak. Of course he knew Ferny well,—having been a captive at the physician's house; but it was natural enough for him to conjecture that the doctor, instead of being fitted to take charge of lunatics, had become a lunatic himself.

Lady Saxondale had fainted, as we have already said: her son had borne her to a sofa—and sustaining her in his arms, was giving vent to ejaculations half frantic, half pathetic.

"Mother dearest mother—No, no—I mean Lady Saxondale—open your eyes! Do look up at me! No harm shall befall you! It is not I who have done it—I will contradict everything that is said—mother—your ladyship—dearest—no, Lady Saxondale!—O God, I am mad! I am frenzied!"

"Ring for her ladyship's maids," exclaimed the volatile Marlow: and he was bounding towards the bell-pull,

when the Marquis of Eagledean called him back.

"No, sir!" said his lordship: "you had better not! Enhance not this terrible exposure. Shut the door, Hawkshaw. Water!—let us throw water on her ladyship's countenance!"

"Oh, my lord!" cried Deveril, flinging a look of wild reproach upon the Marquis; "what have you done?"

"It is not I who have done it!" exclaimed Lord Eagledean. "Heaven itself ordained this to be the day of revelation, atonement, and retribution—the day on which injustice is to be proclaimed and justice done—the day on which imposture is to be unmasked and truth developed—the day, in fine, on which the rightful heir of Saxondale is to take possession of his own; and that heir is he who has hitherto borne the name of William Deveril!"

While giving utterance to these last words, Lord Eagledean swept his looks around upon all present; and the effect was startling indeed for those who were not hitherto in the secret. Lord Petersfield was more than ever struck with the conviction that one can never be sure of anything in this world; and he even began to tremble lest the next announcement to be made should be to the effect that he himself was not Lord Petersfield at all—that he was quite another person—John Noakes or Tom Stiles, as the case might be. Marlow poured forth a perfect volley of questions: Malton looked perfectly confounded. Lord Harold Staunton knew his uncle too well not to feel assured that he was speaking the truth; and moreover the startling announcement which had been made, cleared up in an instant the *one* mystery which he knew Lady Saxondale had always kept inviolably concealed from him. As for Edmund himself,—though we mention him last, heaven knows he was not the least interested in these strange and almost frightful proceedings!—he was now seized with the most torturing misgivings: he turned pale as death, and quivered like an aspen leaf as he lay back in his chair.

But while we are thus describing the effects produced by the Marquis of Eagledean's announcement, this nobleman himself had seized on a decanter of water which stood on a side-table where wine and cake had been placed; and he hastened to sprinkle some of it on Lady Saxondale's

countenance. That countenance was marble-pale; and even before the water was thus sprinkled upon it, there were crystal drops there. They were tears—but not tears that had flowed from her own eyes: they had fallen from the lashes of her son as he bent in frenzy over her. She began to revive; and now our hero, utterly overcome by his own highly wrought—indeed, excruciating feelings—himself fell down in a dead swoon. Hawkshaw and Dr. Ferney hastened to bear him to another sofa in that spacious drawing-room, and the physician now literally tore his garments off his back,—the Squire mechanically assisting, under the impression that it was a necessary process to bring him back to life.

"There!" cried Ferney in a wild excited tone and with vehement gestures: "there is the mark—the proof of his birth!"

"Ah! but I," ejaculated Edmund, springing up to his feet from the chair in which he had lain back, "have also a mark like that!"

"I know it, sir!" was Ferney's quick response: "but this right hand of mine—wretch, villain that I am!—this right hand of mine, sir," he repeated still more vehemently than before, "made that mark upon your shoulder!"

Ejaculations of astonishment burst from the lips of Lord Petersfield, the two solicitors, and Lord Harold Staunton: a wild cry of rage thrilled from the lips of Edmund; and they all gathered round the sofa on which the real Lord Saxondale was stretched in his deep swoon. Those ejaculations were repeated, as their eyes concentrated their glances upon that mark—a mark not so large as a sixpence, but perfectly defining the semblance of a strawberry. Then all those looks, being suddenly withdrawn from that focus, exchanged glances of wonderment with each other.

"My lord, spare me! I conjure you to spare me!" a voice was now heard to speak—a voice the low deep accents of which were filled with a tremendous anguish—a voice, in short: so changed from its natural tone that those on whose ears it fell, had to glance in the direction whence it came in order to assure themselves that it was really the voice of Lady Saxondale.

And her's in sooth it was. She had now recovered: she was sitting up on the sofa, the picture of blank dismay

—the personification of indescribable despair.

"Madam," responded the Marquis of Eagledean, to whom that doleful—Oh! so doleful appeal was made; "it were the very refinement of cruelty to address you in words which should add to the tortures you now experience. I therefore hesitate not to proclaim that as much leniency shall be shown you as under circumstances can be manifested—not however so much for your own sake, as for that of your admirable son who would have made every sacrifice for you!"

"Tell me at once," cried Edmund, flying towards Lady Saxondale with a fierce—a maddened—a diabolic expression of countenance,—“tell me, is this true? Am I not your son?”—and he seized her forcibly by the wrist, literally shaking her in the furious convulsion of his rage.

Her ladyship, though crushed down to the very earth—though trampled upon, as it were, by the iron heel of the sternest calamity—though overwhelmed with the ruins of that fabric of iniquity which had suddenly crumbled in upon her,—nevertheless at the instant experienced one single feeling of satisfaction,—which was that if she herself were utterly discomfited, the same fate had at least overtaken the ill-conditioned wretch whom she had hitherto called her son—the viper whom she had nourished to sting her! For a moment her large dark eyes glistened with that expression of malignant satisfaction as she forcibly tore her arm away from his grasp; and she was about to give utterance to some bitter retort, when the horrifying idea flashed to her mind that if she goaded Edmund to desperation, he might—in a paroxysm of rage and vindictiveness—or in the cruel bewilderment of his feelings proclaim the murder of Adelaide, and that Lady Saxondale was the instigatrix! She accordingly exercised a sudden control over herself; and assuming an air of the profoundest commiseration, said, "Poor boy! it will be better that you and I should have a few minutes' discourse together."

The Marquis of Eagledean knew nothing particularly to the detriment of Edmund, beyond the profligacy of his morals; and the generous nobleman could not help experiencing a certain degree of compassion for the young man who was thus all in a moment hurled from the pinnacle of rank and

wealth into the depth of obscurity and dependence. With this sympathetic feeling, he naturally considered it best that whatsoever explanations had to be given between that woman who had brought up another person's child as her own, and that young man on whom had come, like a thunderbolt, the tremendous announcement that he was *not* the son of her whom he had hitherto regarded as his mother—the Marquis thought, we say that, such explanations ought to take place between them alone together.

He therefore said, "Sir, compose your feelings as well as you are able—trust to the generosity of those who perhaps entertain some little sympathy on your behalf—and I think that I may safely promise you shall not be left altogether uncared for. Lady Saxondale, take him to another room: speak to him there—do as indeed you ought, your best to comfort and console him; and in the meantime I will consult with those who are here upon the course which is to be adopted, so that for your son's sake," and he glanced towards the sofa where the real Lord Saxondale was only just beginning to recover from his deep swoon.—"it shall be measured with as much regard to your feelings as the circumstances will permit."

Edmund,—for so we had better continue to call him, though that was not really the Christian name which he had received at his birth from his mother, Madge Somers,—had not spoken another word after Lady Saxondale had addressed him with that air of seeming compassion. Pale as a ghost, he had stood riveted to the spot—no longer able to shut his eyes to the conviction that everything was indeed at an end so far as rank and riches were associated with himself. The blow was fearful—the shock tremendous: any other mind would probably have gone stark staring mad and shrieked out in the wildness of delirium. But it was not so with Edmund Somers: he seemed to be reduced to an unnatural and incomprehensible state of being: he gasped for breath—he looked as if gazing upon a horrible spectre that had suddenly sprung up before him; and yet the light that shone in the depths of his eyes, was of a sinister and undefinable description.

"Come, Edmund, said Lady Saxondale, still in that low plaintive voice with which she had previously addressed him: "come let us in all things

follow the counsel of the Marquis of Eagledean: for to him have we both now to look for much that will influence our positions—indeed the future of our lives!"

She took the young man's hand; and he suffered himself mechanically to be led from the room. Not a word was spoken by those who remained behind, as they thus went forth: Dr. Ferney, not daring to throw another glance upon Lady Saxondale was intent upon recovering our young hero from his swoon. Her ladyship conducted Edmund to her own boudoir,—this being an apartment remote from that which they had just left, and having double doors that would prevent the possibility of anything which might pass between them being caught up by an eavesdropper; for she well knew that the domestics must already suspect that something strange was going on—and she likewise apprehended that the scene with Edmund Somers would be far from an agreeable one. She had however fearful interest in soothing and tranquillizing him, if possible: she had to prevent him, as already hinted, from revealing in rage or despair—in bewilderment or in madness—the tremendous secret connected with the death of Adelaide.

Edmund had suffered himself to be led up to that boudoir: he had walked like an animated statue, neither looking to the right nor to the left; his hand merely lay in that of Lady Saxondale, but clasped it not. Yet all the while there was still that sinister and incomprehensible light playing in the depths of his eyes.

They were now in the boudoir. Her ladyship had taken the precaution to lock the outer door, and to close securely the inner one, which was covered with scarlet cloth. She made Edmund sit down upon a chair: she took another opposite to him; and now their eyes met. That woman who had reared him as her son, looked him in the face: that young man who had hitherto believed her to be his mother, looked also in the face the woman who was *not* his mother! She beheld the ominous light in his eyes; and for an instant a colder shudder passed through her form—that form which within the last ten minutes had been racked and rent, lacerated and tortured, agonized and crucified, with the most fearful feelings that could possibly be diffused through a human frame from the sources of the soul.

ladyship beheld the young man weeping thus bitterly and plunged into grief, the terror with which he had a few moments back inspired her, turned into a sort of satisfaction—or was at all events relieved; because she flattered herself that she could once more exercise omnipotent sway over him, and prevent him from giving vent either in rage or frenzy to the fearful secret of the murder in the Trent. But all of a sudden Edmund dashed away his tears; and starting up, he bent his eyes upon Lady Saxondale with a renewal of that sinister expression which had before filled her soul with vague, nameless, shapeless terrors; and in a voice that was hoarse and deep he said, “So that woman was my mother? Oh! better that *you* were my mother than *she*—much as I hate you!”

“Hate me, Edmund?”—and Lady Saxondale again quivered all over, and again felt as if she would never pass through this frightful ordeal.

“Yes—hate you!” repeated the young man, with accents so vehements and looks so sinister that it was impossible to doubt the truth of his assertion. “What reason have I for loving you?—but have I not every cause to detest you? Why did you take me from my mother in mine infancy, to bring me up to believe myself that which I am not?—why did you cradle me in down, only that I might be flung back again upon rags?—why did you make me eat off plate of silver and of gold, only that I might be thrown back on the sorriest rust? But this is not all! Why did you,”—and here he ground his teeth with the pent-up fury of his concentrated rage,—“why did you teach me to become criminal? Why, woman—why did you make me a murderer?”

And the last words came hissing from his lips as if borne on the panting breath of a reptile.

“Edmund, Edmund!” exclaimed her ladyship: “wherefore go on thus? You brow all the blame on me——”

“On you?” he vociferated fiercely. “On whom would you that I should accumulate it? Detestable woman that you are! I hate you—and——”

“And what, Edmund!” almost screamed forth Lady Saxondale, as the most awful terrors filled her soul and the rightfulest visions swept like a desolating hurricane through her imagination, —the avowal of the murder from his lips —the summoning of the police—Newgate

—the Old Bailey—the black cap on the judge’s head—the sentence of death—the gibbet—the crowd—the tolling bell—the chaplain’s prayer—the halter—and the drop!

“And what? you ask me,” he cried, his countenance suddenly expressing a fury that was frenzied and terrible. “This!”—and snatching up from the toilet-table a knife which lay there, he made one tiger-like spring at Lady Saxondale.

“No! no! Spare me!—in mercy spare me!” she shrieked out, flying, towards the door.

“Wretch! you shall die!” thundered forth Edmund: and at the same instant he seized upon her.

She turned to battle for her life—while her piercing screams echoed through the house: but her foot tripped—and as she fell, the infuriate Edmund plunged the knife into her bosom. Her rending screams suddenly closed in an awful gasping moan: the young man drew forth the knife from her bosom—and with a wild cry of mingled triumph, rage, and desperation, he plunged it into his own breast. He fell down heavily close where Lady Saxondale herself had fallen; and for a few moments there was a dead silence in that room. But only for a few moments for the door, which her ladyship had locked, was burst open—and in rushed the Marquis of Eagledean, Hawkshaw, Thompson, and the two lawyers—Lord Petersfield almost immediately bringing up the rear. Then what a horrifying spectacle met their eyes!

But where was Dr. Ferney? The true and rightful Lord Saxondale had recovered from his swoon—but only to rave in the delirium of fever. He had been borne to a bed-chamber; and the physiciau was there, in attendance upon him.

And where was Lord Harold Staunton? A few words will suffice to inform the reader. The moment after Lady Saxondale had quitted the State Drawing-room, leading the discomfited and ruined Edmund away, the Marquis of Eagledean had imperiously beckoned Lord Harold to the farther extremity of the apartment; and had there addressed him in the following terms:—

“I have long known that you were steeped to the very lips in profligacies, and that towards myself you have at times harboured the most diabolical intentions. But it is only this day I have learnt the full extent of your

meantime there had been an inquest on the body of Edmund: and from the situation in which his own corpse and Lady Saxondale's inanimate form were found in the boudoir,—coupled with the circumstance that her rending shrieks had alarmed the household,—the jury had no difficulty in coming to the decision that the young man had perished by his own hand, after having endeavoured to murder her ladyship. It was of course necessary that in the depositions made at this inquest, the imposture palmed off upon the world by Lady Saxondale in respect to Edmund, and to the prejudice of the rightful heir, should be fully described; and the report of that inquest, through the medium of the newspapers, gave this much of the astounding narrative to the public. The verdict of the jury included an expression of their belief that the deceased young man, considering all the circumstances, could not have been in a sound state of mind—but that he must have been goaded to frenzy when he perpetrated his double crime: and thus this humane view of the case forbade not his interment with Christian ceremonies. The funeral was a plain and simple one—very different indeed from what it would have been, with all appropriate pomp and splendour, if he had died in possession of that title which for twenty-one years he had unconsciously usurped!

The rightful Lord Saxondale continued under the influence of fever for an entire week: and it was not until the expiration of this interval, that he became possessed of his reasoning faculties. Then he recognised the beloved wife of his bosom—the charming and beautiful Florina—who had unweariedly ministered to him during his illness: but when he began to question her relative to his mother, she was careful not to inform him of the horrible tragedy which had taken place. She merely suffered him to understand that her ladyship was ill and confined to her own chamber: but she gave her husband as much hope as she dared—and perhaps even more, in order to tranquillize him—that this illness of Lady Saxondale's would result in convalescence.

It was not however so. Her ladyship recovered her own consciousness at about the same time as her son regained his in another chamber beneath the same roof. But the wound she had received, though not mortal in

itself was evidently leading to fatal results; and as her last hour drew near, the wretched woman, profoundly conscience-stricken, sought to make all possible atonement for her crimes by a full and complete confession. The Marquis of Eagledean was selected by her as the recipient of these revelations; and one afternoon—about ten days having now elapsed from the date of the tragedy—his lordship found himself seated by the bedside of the dying lady to hear from her lips the narrative of the past. Juliana had been requested to leave the room; and in a feeble voice—in broken language, and with many self-interruptions—Lady Saxondale was enabled to furnish sufficient details for the Marquis to obtain a clear and precise insight into those facts which were previously altogether unknown to him, or which were but dimly outlined to his knowledge.

CHAPTER CLXXIII.

HISTORY OF THE PAST.

THE reader will remember how great were the affliction and dismay which seized upon the old Lord Saxondale and his young wife Harriet, as well as upon the entire household at the castle in Lincolnshire, when the intelligence came upon them like a thunderbolt that the infant son and heir was stolen from its nurse's arms. At first her ladyship was really inclined to believe that Ralph Farefield—who she had no doubt was at the bottom of it—purposed to retain the child in some place of concealment, in order to bring his uncle to terms. But this hope wore off in a few hours: and when she was enabled deliberately and seriously to calculate how much Ralph had to gain by the child's death, she could not blind herself to the conviction that her infant son's murder was an extremity but too certain to be adopted by Farefield,—the risk of discovery being worth running on the one hand, considering the immensity of the stake to be played for on the other. The reader is aware that Lady Saxondale possessed a mind beyond the standard strength of her sex's energies; and thus her resolve was speedily taken. She represented to her husband that it would be advisable for her to repair to London, under an assumed name, and

secretly institute inquiries into Ralph Farefield's recent movements, or act otherwise as circumstances should suggest. The old lord consented; and her ladyship proceeded to the metropolis, accompanied by her principal tire-woman, Mabel Stewart. This Mabel was about thirty years of age—discreet, prudent, and cool-headed—and one in whom her ladyship fancied she could put the utmost trust.

Taking the name of Smith, Lady Saxondale hired lodgings in a respectable house in Islington. This house was occupied by a widow lady named Ferney, whose son had recently commenced practice as a surgeon. The worthy woman had so impoverished herself in order to afford her son the means of completing his professional education, that when the front parlour was converted into a surgery, and the back one into a receiving-room, for patients, the expenses incurred thereby left serious embarrassments behind. Of course Mr. Ferney did not at once reap any considerable fruits from his hard studies; and while there were no incomings on the one hand, yet on the other the debts had to be paid—a certain appearance had to be kept up—he and his mother had to live. The house was larger than was necessary for so small a family—it was well furnished—and though with considerable reluctance, they were compelled to put up a bill announcing the drawing-room floor to let, Lady Saxondale needed lodgings, and also needed the aid of a surgeon in carrying out her design. She saw the bill in the window: she was struck by the coincidence that her two requirements might be afforded beneath one and the same roof; and shrewd as she was, she had no difficulty in reading the circumstances of the people of the house. A struggling medical man—an impoverished mother—and thence the necessity for letting lodgings! She entered the house: she was then in all the bloom of her beauty—and her quick eye showed her in an instant that the pale pensive young surgeon, whom she found seated with his mother, was struck by admiration at her appearance. This, then was the very place for Lady Saxondale; and, as Mrs. Smith, she became the occupant of the drawing-room floor. In order at once to ingratiate herself with the mistress of the house, she took the floor for a year, paying the entire rent in advance; and this godsend suddenly rescued the Ferneys from the

serious embarrassments and apprehensions under which they had been recently labouring.

Lady Saxondale did not let the grass grow under her feet. On leaving Lincolnshire she had not the slightest intention in reality of troubling herself or wasting time about Ralph Farefield's proceedings: her plan was already settled: she was resolved to obtain some poor person's child, and represent it as her own lost infant son. For she argued to herself that if Farefield had not really made away with her little Edmund and should hereafter produce him, the heir would in this case be restored; and Ralph would be too glad to hush up the whole matter without seeking to punish her for a fraud and imposture—because she in her turn could punish him for the theft of her son. But, on the other hand, if he had really murdered that son—which she felt convinced he had—he would not dare proclaim that the suppositions one whom she purposed to palm off, was *not* her own child; for if he did, it would be tantamount to confessing himself the murderer of the true, rightful, and lawful one. Therefore, in either case, the astute Lady Saxondale saw that she would be perfectly safe, and that in the long run Ralph Farefield must inevitably be outwitted. She made a confidante of Mabel; and scarcely were they installed in their lodgings at the Ferneys' house, than the faithful domestic was despatched into the streets of London and to the poorer neighbourhoods, in search of such a child as by age and appearance would answer the required purpose.

Lady Saxondale was a well-read woman; and in the course of her reading she had stumbled upon a book containing many curious narratives relative to the uncertainty of circumstantial evidence; and the fallibility of human judgments when trusting thereto. One history in particular had struck her—a history that is doubtless familiar to many of our readers: namely, that of Martin Guerre. The circumstances of this remarkable story may be shortly summed up. Martin Guerre, a Frenchman, took leave of his wife to embark on a speculative voyage to the Mediterranean. Years elapsed—and he returned not; so that the wife believed herself to be a widow. But at length the inhabitants of her native place were one day

tartled by the intelligence that Martin Guerre had come back, and that happiness had re-entered his long deserted and desolate home. The neighbours flocked to congratulate the husband and wife who were thus restored to each other; and the tale of the former was simply that he had been a prisoner for years amongst the Algerines. Time passed on; and again, one day, were the inhabitants of the town startled by the intelligence that another Martin Guerre had just made his appearance. Again, too, were there crowds at the house; and immense as the surprise of the neighbours on finding that the two Martin Guerres were twin brothers. The wife was herself utterly unable to decide between the aims of the two; and an appeal was made to the law-tribunals to decide between them. The tale told by the last-named Martin Guerre, was that he had been in slavery, where he had fallen in with his litigant rival; and that their personal appearance presented remarkable similitude, a great friendship sprang up between them. He went on to say that he freely unbosomed all his family secrets to his friend, which would account for this latter being enabled to speak to the wife on circumstances which she would naturally suppose known only to herself and to her husband. Finally, the plaintiff informed the court that his rival had managed to escape before him; and that it was evident he had lately availed himself of these extraordinary circumstances to gain possession of a comfortable home and a handsome wife—both belonging to another. Then came the most remarkable features in this trial. The plaintiff showed certain spots upon his body, which the wife proved to have marked her first husband: but to the wonder of the court the defendant exhibited marks precisely similar! However, it was finally ascertained that the plaintiff—namely, the last-named Martin Guerre—was the true one, and that the other was a base impostor who had usurped his rights. The latter subsequently confessed that skilful surgeon's hands had created upon his person the very marks which closely resembled those on the body of the real Martin Guerre, and which the impostor had during a series of years frequent opportunity of observing when they worked together half-buried on the fortifications or in the

arsenals of Algiers.

This was the history which had made an impression on the mind of Lady Saxondale, and which flashed to her recollection with strangely suggestive impulses, at the moment she was in bitterness bewailing the loss of her son. The hand of a skilful surgeon had created divers marks of a particular nature, and all according to a description given from mere memory, on the back and shoulders of Martin Guerre's rival: and could not another surgical hand create the *one* mark which was needed on the neck of an infant as a proof of its identity with the lost heir of Saxondale? But while Mabel was looking after a child, Lady Saxondale herself was doing her best, not merely to ascertain the degree of intelligence possessed by the pale pensive surgeon, but also to make an impression upon his heart. Though too proud to be beguiled into weakness or frailty by actual sentiment, there was nevertheless nothing to which she would not stoop, if necessary, in order to accomplish those aims that were to outwit Ralph Farefield, and secure to herself a paramount ascendancy in the Saxondale family during the long minority which, considering the old lord's age, an heir might have to pass through after his death. She did her best to ingratiate herself with the widow. Ferney—made her presents, but in the most delicate manner—and, under pretence of adding to her own comforts, purchased a quantity of new things, in the shape of plate, china, and furniture, which in an apparently casual manner she gave the widow to understand she should leave behind when her term was up. Her excuse for being in London was a Chancery suit; and she alleged herself to be the widow of a rich country squire in the north of England. She soon discovered that the surgeon was a man of extraordinary talent—that he was devoted to his profession—that he had made it his study by day and by night—and that he had submitted to almost incredible privations in order to purchase "subjects" (in other parlance, dead bodies) at different times to forward his anatomical practice. The more Lady Saxondale saw of him, the more was she convinced that she could model him to her purpose. He had a laboratory fitted up in the house—and she affected the deepest interest

secretly institute inquiries into Ralph Farefield's recent movements, or act otherwise as circumstances should suggest. The old lord consented; and her ladyship proceeded to the metropolis, accompanied by her principal tire-woman, Mabel Stewart. This Mabel was about thirty years of age—discreet, prudent, and cool-headed—and one in whom her ladyship fancied she could put the utmost trust.

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startled by the intelligence that Martin Guerre had come back, and that happiness had re-entered his long deserted and desolate home. The neighbours flocked in to congratulate the husband and wife who were thus restored to each other; and the tale of the former was simply that he had been a prisoner for years amongst the Algerines. Time passed on; and again, one day, were the inhabitants of the town startled by the intelligence that another Martin Guerre had just made his appearance. Again, too, were there crowds at the house; and immense was the surprise of the neighbours on finding that the two Martin Guerres were twin brothers. The wife was herself utterly unable to decide between the claims of the two; and an appeal was made to the law-tribunals to decide betwixt them. The tale told by the last coming Martin Guerre, was that he had been in slavery, where he had fallen in with his litigant rival; and that as their personal appearance presented a remarkable similitude, a great friendship sprang up between them. He went on to say that he freely unbosomed all his family secrets to his friend,—which would account for this latter being enabled to speak to the wife upon circumstances which she would naturally suppose known only to herself and to her husband. Finally, the plaintiff informed the court that his rival had managed to escape before him; and that it was evident he had barely availed himself of these extraordinary circumstances to gain possession of a comfortable home and a handsome wife—both belonging to another. Then came the most remarkable features in this trial. The plaintiff showed certain spots upon his body, which the wife proved to have marked her first husband; but to the wonder of the court the defendant exhibited marks precisely similar! However, it was finally ascertained that the plaintiff—namely, the last-coming Martin Guerre—was the true one, and that the other was a base impostor who had usurped his rights. The latter subsequently confessed that a skilful surgeon's hands had created upon his person the very marks which so closely resembled those on the body of the real Martin Guerre, and which the impostor had during a series of years frequent opportunity of observing when they worked together half naked on the fortifications or in the

arsenals of Algiers.

This was the history which had made an impression on the mind of Lady Saxondale, and which flashed to her recollection with strangely suggestive impulses, at the moment she was in bitterness bewailing the loss of her son. The hand of a skilful surgeon had created divers marks of a particular nature, and all according to a description given from mere memory, on the back and shoulders of Martin Guerre's rival: and could not another surgical hand create the *one* mark which was needed on the neck of an infant as a proof of its identity with the lost heir of Saxondale? But while Mabel was looking after a child, Lady Saxondale herself was doing her best, not merely to ascertain the degree of intelligence possessed by the pale pensive surgeon, but also to make an impression upon his heart. Though too proud to be beguiled into weakness or frailty by actual sentiment, there was nevertheless nothing to which she would not stoop, if necessary, in order to accomplish those aims that were to outwit Ralph Farsfield, and secure to herself a paramount ascendancy in the Saxondale family during the long minority which, considering the old lord's age, an heir might have to pass through after his death. She did her best to ingratiate herself with the widow Ferney—made her presents, but in the most delicate manner—and, under pretence of adding to her own comforts, purchased a quantity of new things, in the shape of plate, china, and furniture, which in an apparently casual manner she gave the widow to understand she should leave behind when her term was up. Her excuse for being in London was a Chancery suit; and she alleged herself to be the widow of a rich country squire in the north of England. She soon discovered that the surgeon was a man of extraordinary talent—that he was devoted to his profession—that he had made it his study by day and by night—and that he had submitted to almost incredible privations in order to purchase “subjects” (in other parlance, dead bodies) at different times to forward his anatomical practice. The more Lady Saxondale saw of him, the more was she convinced that she could model him to her purpose. He had a laboratory fitted up in the house—and she affected the deepest interest

in his experiments. Ferney was delighted: he believed that this interest was genuine: for he was simple-minded, honest, and credulous—a man of wonderful intellect in one sense and of profound ignorance in another—intelligent only in all that related to the objects of his studies, but ignorant as a mere child in the ways of the world and in the workings of the human heart. In less than a week he was completely infatuated with his mother's beautiful lodger. With him, indeed, it was love at first sight; and the passion thus gained ground so rapidly from the circumstance that its object seemed to display such deep interest in the very matters which so profoundly interested himself. Though she was careful at first not to manifest anything bordering on an indelicate forwardness by accompanying him to his laboratory, yet of an evening she would visit the sitting-room occupied by his mother and himself; and while the old lady dozed in her arm-chair, she would turn the conversation upon the enthusiastic surgeon's experiments—asking questions—listening with apparent delight to his explanations—and, with her own ready intelligence, proving that she fully comprehended them. It was a dangerous position for a young man, whose unsophisticated heart had no defences afforded by worldly experience against the wiles of a beautiful woman,—a dangerous position, we say, for him to be placed in; and, unconsciously as it were, he abandoned himself to the growing infatuation.

Within the first week after the arrival in London, chance threw Mabel Stewart in the way of Margaret Somers—a widow with an infant child, the father of which had died ere it was born. The woman—who, as well as the babe, was wrapped in the rags of beggary—asked alms of Mabel Stewart. She contemplated the child attentively; and in so doing, observed that it had a little mole between the neck and the shoulder, almost in the very place where the strawberry appeared upon the lost heir of Saxondale. Affecting to be deeply touched with the woman's tale, she gave her some silver, and bade her call on the following day at the house in Islington, “when perhaps something more would be done for her.” Madge Somers did call—and saw Lady Saxondale, who at once felt assured that the child, by its appearance, would answer her purpose. She treated Madge

Somers with the utmost kindness—gave her money and clothes—and bade her return in a day or two. She then redoubled her wiles in respect to Ferney—but so artfully, as not to transgress the bounds of modesty nor actual propriety. And *now*, too, she hinted that she should feel pleased in the inspection of his laboratory,—choosing for the opportunity a morning when Mrs. Ferney was absent for a few hours on a visit to some friends. When there, alone with the surgeon, she bent over crucibles and retorts, examined phials and glasses, witnessed experiments, and even practised some,—all the while fanning his passion with the thousand and one arts which a skilful woman of the world knows so well how to carry into effect. In a moment of irresistible infatuation, Ferney cast himself at her feet, vowing that he was her slave. She gave him encouragement—but still in a manner that was calculated only to render him more completely submissive to her will. Availing herself of this opportunity, she turned the discourse gradually away from purely chemical experiments—questioned him on surgical matters—and gradually advanced towards the topic which she was anxious to broach. The unsuspicious Ferney,—while expatiating on the subject,—assured her that he would undertake to create almost any marks resembling natural ones on the person of an infant. But it is not necessary to dwell upon this point of the narrative, nor to extend the details of those means by which Lady Saxondale led Ferney to promise that he would give her a proof of his skill in this particular respect. Madge Somers came again; and Lady Saxondale now played off the artillery of her wiles upon this woman. She invented some story to account for her desire of possessing herself of a child whom she would adopt as her own and bring up in affluence. The bribe offered, was a large one; and Madge Somers had been dragged through the mire of too much misery and suffering, and too many low scenes, to have much good principle left: but still she had the natural love of a mother for her offspring. Nevertheless, she consented to part with it; and leaving the child, she went away with a heavy purse in her pocket.

The widow Ferney was under too many obligations to Mrs. Smith (as Lady Saxondale called herself) to ask impertinent questions, or to exhibit an

inconvenient degree of curiosity: while the surgeon was too infatuated with the beautiful lodger, and too callous in respect to proceedings which did not concern himself, to pay any particular attention to this freak of the child being left at the house: for Lady Saxondale was careful not to let it transpire that she had purchased it, and that its mother had left it for good. Ferney was easily induced to practise his skill upon the infant; and Lady Saxondale, as if quite in a casual manner, and also as if catching at the first whimsical thought which entered her head, expressed her wonder whether he could convert the mole into the form of a strawberry. He declared that he could. Then she began to define specifications in respect to the actual size, shape, and appearance which this strawberry-mark was to take—all, she said with laughing cajolery, to put his skill the more severely to the test. He undertook to gratify what he regarded as her caprice—and with all the less hesitation because the operation would be attended with little pain to the child, and thus his natural humanity would not be shocked. It was done; and Lady Saxondale experienced a glow of inward triumph when she perceived upon the neck of the babe a mark so closely resembling that with which her own son was born, that she felt convinced it would deceive the medical man and the nurse who had seen the lost heir at his birth. And now, too, she could fully comprehend the exact truth of all the details in the history of Martin Guerre.

But it was necessary to remain in London until the mark itself should be completely healed up; and from time to time she wrote cheering and encouraging letters to her husband in Lincolnshire, as described in one of the opening chapters of this narrative. Days grew into weeks; and during this interval Lady Saxondale continued to encourage, without however seeming to do so, the infatuation of the surgeon's passion. But as the widow did not again leave the house for more than half-an hour at a time, Lady Saxondale was too cautious to enter the laboratory again: she did not choose to do aught to excite the woman's suspicions—and she had induced Ferney to keep the surgical proceeding of the strawberry-mark profoundly secret from his mother. This he

he under the empire of Lady Saxondale, that it was not difficult for her to obtain from him another pledge—namely, that he would never mention the circumstance at all. But in his calmer moments, thoughts—dim, vague, and shapeless suspicions—would steal into the surgeon's mind that he was involved in some mystery which he could not comprehend—that there was a meaning and a purpose in the proceedings of the strawberry-mark—that it was not a mere whim on the lady's part, nor a mere test of his skill. A secret voice whispered in his soul that he had been unconsciously drawn into a complicity with something which he could not comprehend that Mrs. Smith was more than she seemed—that rank, and distinction, and a haughtier name were probably veiled under the commonplace appellation of Mrs. Smith. But when he again found himself in her presence, all his scruples and suspicions vanished—he seemed to live only for her—he rejoiced in having been enabled to do aught to serve her, either in the ministering to a mere whim or in the furtherance of some deeper and more important end.

But if Lady Saxondale visited the laboratory no more, she nevertheless regularly passed the evenings in the sitting-room of the widow and her son: or else she had them to tea in her own apartment. While the old lady dozed, or actually slept soundly in her arm-chair, the wily Harriet Saxondale practised all her arts to enslave the surgeon so completely that when she should be gone, her image might remain on his soul, to render him faithful to his pledges of secrecy. She exhibited an unwearying interest in his experiments—she learnt his receipts—and amongst them, was one for a certain composition or elimination, of which he was in reality the discoverer, but which has only within the last few years been known to the world under the name of *Chloroform*. Thus a month from the date of the arrival in London was drawing to a close: the mark was completely healed—and Lady Saxondale was thinking of getting back to Lincolnshire, when a circumstance occurred which for a moment threatened all her plans with utter annihilation. One evening Madge Somers made her appearance at the house; and as Lady Saxondale was taking tea with the Ferneys in their

straight for Mabel Stewart's chamber—which she knew. Mabel was at the moment undressing the babe; and she was taken so completely aback—indeed, was so utterly confounded by the suddenness with which Margaret Somers burst in upon her—that she had not time to cover up the mark that had been made on the infant's shoulder. Madge, impelled by motherly affection, sprang forward to snatch up the child and embrace it—when she caught sight of that mark. She was now confounded in her turn; and Lady Saxondale, having been informed by the servant of the house “that Mrs. Somers had come to fetch away the babe which Mrs. Smith had been so kindly keeping for a little while,” hurried up to Mabel's chamber. Then ensued an exciting scene. Lady Saxondale endeavoured to persuade Madge Somers that the original mark had strangely and unexpectedly taken this development: the mother knew not what to think—she scarcely believed the tale that was told her, and yet she did not know how to discredit it. Again and again did she study the mark and its exact nature—or rather its appearance, as artificially rendered: and thus it became indelibly impressed on her memory. She vowed that she would have her child again—that she repented of the bargain—that it was an unnatural one, which she could not be compelled to keep—although she admitted having squandered away in dissipation the greater portion of the gold she had received. Lady Saxondale offered larger bribes to induce the woman to adhere to her original compact; and after considerable difficulty, Madge Somers assented to her ladyship's overtures. She went away with five hundred pounds in her pocket; and the next morning Lady Saxondale intimated to the Ferneys that urgent business, connected with the fictitious Chancery suit, compelled her at once to leave for the country.

She did not however choose to say that she never intended to return to her lodgings—though she whispered to the widow, when the son was not by, that if she did not come to retake possession of them in a month, her lease might be considered to be abandoned. Ferney himself was overwhelmed with affliction at the prospect of this abrupt separation: but to him she whispered with a tender smile, that she should return shortly. She begged his acceptance of a splendid diamond-

ring: and he, scarcely knowing what memorial to give in return, thought that nothing could be more suitable than the results of some of the delicate and difficult experiments in which she had taken so much interest. With characteristic simplicity, he presented to her a phial of chloroform, together with a small casket filled with elegantly cut little bottles, containing delicious perfumes. Lady Saxondale and Mabel returned into Lincolnshire with the child; and they reached the castle to find the old lord dead, and to learn that Ralph Farefield had just arrived.

The reader is aware of the circumstances under which Lady Saxondale and Ralph Farefield met. The child was displayed, with the mark upon its neck; and Ralph was at once smitten with the conviction that Clifflin had deceived him in his assertion that the infant heir of Saxondale had been made away. The reader will recollect that her ladyship led Ralph Farefield into a window-recess—and there, pretending to have some sympathy for him, she made an appointment to meet him at eleven o'clock on the same night in the chapel. The fact was, that notwithstanding all her previous self-reasonings in respect to the certainty of outwitting Farefield, she was afraid of him. She knew him to be a desperate man; and as he was now placed in desperate circumstances she felt that she was not safe so long as he remained in existence. The suppositious child which had already cost her so much anxiety and trouble, might be cunningly and treacherously made away with; and then adieu to all her grand schemes, her towering hopes, and her lofty projects! She had consummated a tremendous imposture: she now felt that it was necessary to ensure it by an additional crime. Her heart had become hardened—her soul indurated—her conscience blunted, against all compunction and remorse; and it was Ralph Farefield's death which was required to consolidate the position she had been at such pains to build up.

She met him in the chapel: she told him a tale of a treasure being concealed in the vault. He was desperate; and any straw flung out to him, was a hope to save him from drowning in the vortex of despair. Besides, though he himself was vile and so capable of iniquity, he could not possibly think

that the beautiful Lady Saxondale was equally wicked. It was with an air of ingenuous frankness that she had told him of twenty thousand pounds being in the vault,—of which he himself was to take five: but in his own mind he resolved to self-appropriate the entire sum. He found, however, that she had taken her precautions against any sudden attack which vindictiveness might urge him to make upon her—and that there was a witness to the entire proceeding: for when bidden to look forth from the chapel-door, he beheld Mabel in the corridor. Then he knew that if he attempted violence to retain the entire treasure, an alarm could be raised; and he was constrained to make up his mind to content himself with the portion she had promised. In obedience to lady Saxondale's instructions, he began to descend the steps leading into the vault,—she following him. But all in a moment her arm was stretched forth—a kerchief was applied to his nostrils—he inhaled the fatal chloroform, and fell headlong into the water which flooded the place. There he was drowned.

It happened that almost immediately after the departure of Lady Saxondale and Mabel, with the child, from London, business suddenly compelled Mr. Ferney to proceed to Gainsborough—a town he had never visited before; nor indeed was he ever previously in that part of the country at all. Little did he suspect that he was only within a few miles of the Mrs. Smith who had captivated his heart, and who was in reality the now widowed Lady Saxondale: and little, too, on the other hand, did Lady Saxondale herself fancy for a single moment that the surgeon on whom she had practised her wiles, was for the time being so near a neighbour. He became possessed of the body of Ralph Farefield in the way described in an earlier chapter of this narrative: and immediately returning to London, never visited Lincolnshire again until many long years had elapsed, and he had risen to the highest eminence in his profession.

And years and years too must now be passed over in this chapter of explanations,—the leap taking us from the middle of 1825 to the middle of 1844. The next incident we have to note was the meeting of Madge Somers with her son, after a separation of nineteen years. During that

interval she had passed through the depravities of an abandoned life,—so that when she was first introduced to the reader in our opening chapters, she had become the companion and the accomplice of such villains as Chiffin the Cannibal and the rest of the gang whose headquarters were at the public-house in Agar Town. It will be recollected how Edmund fell in with her at the cottage near the Seven Sisters' Road, when he was in search of Angela Vivaldi. She laid a plot with Chiffin for his assassination while he slept: but just as she was about to plunge her knife into his breast, she caught sight of the mark upon his neck. She knew him to be her son: for that mark was indelibly impressed upon her memory. His features, too—though he was now a young man—were precisely what she could fancy the infantile face would have grown into. There was no doubt it was her own son whom she had meant to immolate! We need not recapitulate the means she adopted to get him safe out of the house, and save him from an otherwise certain death at the hand of Chiffin. When he was gone, she recollected that Chiffin had exhibited a strange surprise when she had mentioned to him that the intended victim was Lord Saxondale. She had just discovered that he who bore the name of Lord Saxondale was none other than her own offspring; and she therefore became anxious to learn why that name should have in any way interested Cannibal. By means of brandy-and-water she drew the ruffian out—and learnt from him how he had been engaged long years back to steal and to make away with the rightful heir of Saxondale, but how the child had been left amongst gipsies. The very next night Madge Somers proceeded to Saxondale House in Park Lane,—a night on which its noble mistress gave a grand banquet. Lady Saxondale knew her in a moment—though time and dissipation, depravity and iniquity, had traced upon her countenance those strong lines which were not there when long years back she had surrendered up her child. Madge bluntly told her ladyship that she now comprehended everything; and she received a considerable sum of money as a bribe to keep the secret. With a portion of that money she fulfilled a promise made to Chiffin, of indemnifying him for the loss sustained by the

much. Therefore, when some days afterwards another scene with Mabel took place, and the woman insisted that all the domestics of the household should be formally instructed to show her the completest deference,—Lady Saxondale's mind was made up with reference to one whose existence upon earth was fraught with so much terror and danger in her eyes. That same night Mabel was poisoned with a drop of Dr. Ferney's fatal elimination.

The next incident which has to be noticed, is the visit paid by Juliana at night to Madge Somers. In a chance conversation with Edmund, she learnt, as will be remembered, a description of this woman, and it precisely tallied with that which she had already received from the lips of Frank Paton. She was at that time at daggers drawn with her mother, and was therefore most anxious to ascertain wherefore such an ill-looking person could visit Lady Saxondale, and what power she had acquired over her. Guided by her information received from Edmund, she set out—visited Madge at the cottage—and by pretending to come on a message from Lady Saxondale, gradually and skilfully wormed out of her enough to make her comprehend the tremendous secret connected with Edmund. These circumstances were followed by the visit of Lady Saxondale and Juliana to the castle in Lincolnshire. There, as it will be remembered, Lord Harold Staunton boldly propounded his plans to Lady Saxondale, and gave her to understand that he meant to make her his wife. She promised compliance,—though secretly cherishing a very different intention. Lord Harold was to go to London for the purpose of bribing Emily Archer into silence with regard to the tale of the masquerade and the duel: but no sooner had he taken his departure, when Lady Saxondale wrote a letter to Chiffin, desiring him to hasten down to the castle. She had resolved to make away with Lord Harold: but inasmuch as Mabel had died so recently and so suddenly beneath her roof in London, she feared that *another* sudden death so closely following on the former, and beneath the roof of another of her mansions, would lead to suspicion. She therefore discarded the idea of poison—and wrote, as just described, to summon Chiffin to her aid.

Lord Harold returned into Lincolnshire, and was closely followed by

Emily Archer herself. From the interview which took place between her ladyship and the ballet-dancer, the former perceived that she was completely in the power of the latter, and that circumstances had thus raised up in her path another obstacle which must be cleared away. Having already made up her mind to a fresh deed of turpitude, in respect to Harold, it required no great struggle with her conscience, and no severe battling against compunctious scruples, to transfer her murderous intent from the young nobleman to the ballet-dancer. With that devilish cunning, to which was characteristic of her, she calculated that she might render Harold her instrument in her new design, and postpone for farther consideration, whether she should marry him or not. Indeed, she almost began to think it would be better to make him her husband, as he had already become her paramour. She was not too old to be devoid of dread as to the consequences of the intrigue; and at all events she would secure, in the half infatuated, half selfish young nobleman, a permanent co-operator and accomplice in her numerous machinations. She broke her wishes to him in respect to Emily Archer—and by various representations, arts and wiles, she bent him to her purpose. The plan was all arranged; and in order to place Harold in circumstances which might utterly avert suspicion after the enactment of the contemplated tragedy, the little scene was got up in respect to the apparent accident with Mr. Hawkshaw's thoroughbred. It will be remembered that the appointment, with Emily Archer and her maid was arranged for between nine and ten o'clock in the evening of that same day,—the spot being midway between the castle and Gainsborough. Lady Saxondale retired from the drawing-room for about a quarter of an hour, on pretence of writing letters in the library: but in reality she repaired to the chamber occupied by Staunton, and where it was supposed he was stretched helplessly, on his back in consequence of the accident. But according to preconcerted arrangement, he was ready dressed for his expedition. He muffled himself in his cloak, so as to hide his countenance in case of meeting any one—and also in case the attack upon the intended victims should fail and he might have to fly to escape detection on their part. He was

moreover provided with his pistols, each being double-barrelled, and every barrel loaded with a bullet. Then aided by Lady Saxondale, he passed forth from the castle by means of a window in one of the tapestry-chambers, and the tree which grew against that casement.

A little later in the evening, when supper was served up, Florina suddenly intimated her intention of ascending to her brother's chamber, to inquire if he would partake of some refreshment. Lady Saxondale, knowing he could not as yet have possibly returned, was for an instant smitten with dismay at the threatened proceedings: but instantaneously recovering herself, she affably offered to accompany Florina. They proceeded to the chamber of the supposed invalid,—her ladyship, taking good care to be the first to reach the door; and affecting to listen on the threshold, she made a sign for Florina to remain where she was. Then she advanced on tiptoe to the couch, wherein she well knew she should find nobody, and hastening back to the young lady with every appearance of noiseless caution, assured her that her brother was sleeping. Thus did the wily woman extricate herself from an embarrassment which a few minutes before had appeared serious indeed. When the household retired to rest, she proceeded again to Harold's chamber—and this time found him there. The pistol had sufficed to do the deed,—each of the two barrels of that one weapon having sent forth a bullet with fatal effect. The masquerade-dress had been thrown into the river: but in his confusion and horror Harold had likewise flung in the pistol which had accomplished the double murder. The other weapon, which there had been no necessity to use was restored to his pistol case. From Harold's chamber Lady Saxondale proceeded to the chapel, which she was accustomed to visit on particular nights, in order to see if Chiffin had attended to her letter. She found him there; and from his lips heard the confirmation of Harold's tale of the tragedy. But she did not require the villain's services *now*, for the purpose which had originally induced her to write to him; instead of making away with Lord Harold, she had decided upon espousing him. She however engaged the Cannibal on that occasion, by the offer of an immense bribe, to rid her path

of Mr. Gunthorpe and William Deverill—little suspecting at the instant that the former was a great nobleman and the latter was her own son. Early on the following morning Lady Saxondale visited Harold's chamber again: for a thought had struck her, filling her mind with uneasiness. The cloths he had worn on the previous evening, were sure to be wet and might be stained with blood: these evidences of the crime must therefore be caused to disappear. It was as she suspected: those garments were in the condition she had foreseen. A bundle was therefore made of them; and from the window of the tapestry-chamber did she consign them to the depths of the Trent.

Emily Archer was no more: *that* obstacle was removed from her path;—but scarcely was this crime consummated, when another circumstance for the moment threatened Lady Saxondale with destruction. This was the sudden appearance of Dr. Ferney, at the Castle,—Dr. Ferney, who now discovered who was the Mrs. Smith that he had so long known by no other name, but whom he at length found to be the brilliant Lady Saxondale! He came to inform her that the body of Mabel Stewart had been taken to his house, and that he had ascertained she had died by poison—that very poison the elimination of which was one of the results of his own experiments. It is however only necessary to glance at this circumstance for the purpose of reminding the reader how Lady Saxondale succeeded in overcoming the scruples of the physician, and rendering him pliant to her interests and ductile to her purposes once more.

Shortly after these occurrences, Madge Somers found her way into Lincolnshire. Her funds were exhausted—she required more money: and whence could she so readily or so easily obtain it as from the hands of Lady Saxondale? Having arrived at Gainsborough, she was on her way to the Castle, when she accidentally slipped into the river, and was gallantly rescued by William Deverill from a watery grave. They were both hospitably treated at the peasant's cottage. Madge, on recovering—and previous to taking her departure—was desirous to express her gratitude to the young gentleman whose magnanimous conduct had made a deep impression upon the woman's mind. But while she

was seated with him in the chamber where he lay, he fainted through exhaustion: and then, to her infinite surprise, Madge beheld between his shoulder, a mark precisely similar to that which she knew to be on the person of her own son—the young man then passing as Lord Saxondale. It will be remembered that from the lips of Chiffin she had heard the entire story of how the rightful heir of Saxondale had been stolen in his infancy, and had been left amongst gipsies: she now therefore knew that in her deliverer from a watery grave she beheld that heir! She scrutinized his features—and she saw a sufficient resemblance between his countenance and that of Lady Saxondale, to corroborate her belief. When he awoke to consciousness, the facts she gleaned from him confirmed the idea—if any such confirmation were needed. The reader will remember with what solemn earnestness she adjured him to say whether he had listened favourably to Lady Saxondale's overtures of love; and likewise how strangely the ejaculation "Ah!" had come forth from her lips, when in the course of conversation he declared that he had never been within the walls of Saxondale Castle in all his life.

It appears to be a special decree of Providence that no nature shall ever become so completely brutalized but that it has at least one single glimmering of a better feeling left,—that no heart shall be rendered so utterly obdurate as not to have one single chord that may sooner or later vibrate with a kind sympathy. All this was illustrated in the case of Madge Somers. She own her life to the young man who lay stretched before her eyes: and she was touched on his behalf. She saw that a tremendous wrong had been perpetrated, and that he was debarred of his just rights. Her conscience smote her for having surrendered up her own son to usurp the place which this young man ought to occupy; and there was even a sensation of solemn awe in her soul as the thought was forced upon her that heaven itself had sent this young man to deliver her from death, in order that by the awakening of her sympathies and her remorse, its own inscrutable purposes might be worked out in the bringing of him to the attainment and enjoyment of his own. Madge was a singular being; and her course was decisively taken. She at once saw that,

without corroborative evidence, the bare assertion of William Deveril's claims to the estates and peerage of Saxondale, would be but of little avail—and that everything depended on the discovery of the man Thompson, who could tell more about him. For Deveril had been adopted as the child of those to whom he was evidently in no way related: he had regarded them as his parents: nothing had occurred to make him suspect the contrary; and as they were dead and gone, the evidence of one who might tell a different tale and show that he was *not* their son, was indispensably needful. Madge Somers was sanguine as well as persevering. She was resolved to search for the man Thompson, and to set out upon the enterprise with as much courage and spirit as ever did a warrior of other times embark upon a crusade to a far-off land.

The narrative of explanations is now drawing towards a close; and there remains only one incident to which attention need be specially directed. This was the consignment of Edmund as an alleged lunatic to the care of Dr. Ferney. It will be remembered that when Edmund was removed thither from the asylum of Dr. Burdett in the middle of the night, Dr. Ferney was left in ignorance until the very last moment of the name of the patient he was about to receive. This name was not mentioned to him until Dr. Burdett's keeper was hurriedly taking his leave; and the next moment the physician remained alone in the parlour with the young man who had been announced to him as Lord Saxondale. The mere mention of the name struck upon Ferney's heart as a remorse; and as he contemplated the bearer of that name, and saw that he possessed not the faintest resemblance to Lady Saxondale, strange suspicions began agitating in the physician's mind. Now for the first time did those thoughts of the past, which were dim, vague, and shapeless in respect to the mystery of the strawberry-mark—begin to develop themselves into consistency; and he shuddered within himself as he thought it possible that he could at length read the tremendous truth. Hence that anguished murmuring to himself of "My God! my God! if it should be so—and I have been instrumental—But no: it cannot be—But if not *that*, what *else*?"

Tortured by the horrified feelings thus excited within him, Ferney waited in feverish impatience until he

thought Edmund was asleep in the room to which he was consigned: and thither did he stealthily repair. Edmund *did* sleep; and the physician, unfastening his night-garments, examined his shoulder. Yes—his suspicion was confirmed: *there* was the mark which his own hand had made! On the following day he called in a half-distracted state of mind upon Lady Saxondale: but again did the wily woman succeed in over-ruling all his compunctions and conquering all his scruples.

The reader knows the rest—not forgetting the murder of Adelaide, Edmund's wife;—and it is therefore useless to have recourse to any additional recapitulation. It will however be perceived that *all* the details which have been given in this chapter, could not have emanated entirely from the lips of Lady Saxondale when she lay upon her death-bed, and when her confession was made to the Marquis of Eagledenn. But those facts which were deficient in her own narrative, were either already within his lordship's knowledge, or the range of his conjecture—or else were subsequently revealed by Ferney: so that no incident was wanting to afford in due time a complete reading of all the mysteries of the past.

Lady Saxondale died in the evening of the same day on which her confession was made;—and let us hope that the repentance which she expressed, was sincere. It was not until several days afterwards that it was deemed prudent to break the intelligence of her decease to her son, Lord Saxondale: but though for a few hours it plunged him into a relapse, yet this was succeeded by a development of energy arising from a sense of the last duty which he had to perform towards his parent. Forgotten was everything in the shape of injury that he had sustained at her hands: he thought of her only with mingled love and grief; he followed her remains to the tomb—and the tears which he shed over her coffin, were as full of anguish as if it were the best, the kindest, and the most virtuous mothers whose loss was thus deplored.

CHAPTER CLXXIV.

A NIGHT IN FRANCE.

It was about ten days after the tragic incidents at Saxondale House

in Park Lane, and between eight and nine o'clock in the evening, that an ill-looking man, very indifferently dressed, entered a small wine-shop in the little town of Vairan, situate midway between Lyons and Grenoble. He passed into a room devoted for the accommodation of wayfarers and customers; and in wretchedly broken French, called for some brandy and something to eat. The French waiter looked at the fellow with a very evil eye, as if he thought that he was scarcely capable of paying even the moderate expense to be incurred for his refreshments—or at all events that his appearance was of so suspicious a nature the establishment could very well do without such a patron. The man,—whose countenance was of a most hangdog description, and the fierceness of which was enhanced by a dark beard of three or four day's growth,—scowled terribly upon the waiter; and tossing down a couple of francs, growlingly muttered a frightful imprecation in English,—adding in his broken French, "Take your money, and give me the change."

The waiter, though still with some degree of reluctance, quitted the room to fetch what the man had ordered—and presently returned therewith. The fellow was in the midst of his repast, moistening his bread and meat with a frequent draught of brandy and water,—when the door of the room opened; and another English wayfarer entered, whose appearance was scarcely more commendable than that of the other. He was dressed like a decayed groom or coachman—but had altogether so savage an expression of countenance that it was difficult to suppose he could have recently been in any gentleman's service in either of those capacities. The man who had first entered, raised his eyes from the meal before him; and when his looks encountered those of the newcomer, they both started with the suddenness of mutual recognition, and grim smiles of satisfaction and astonishment appeared upon their countenances.

"What, Chiffin, old feller?" ejaculated the one who had last entered: and he thrust forth his hand.

"Yes—it's me, Mat," responded the Cannibal, laying down his food and grasping the Cadger's outstretched hand. "It's no other than the famous Mr. Chiffin, Esquire, that you see before you."

"And uncommon sorry I am to see Mr. Chiffin in no better plight," answered Mat, surveying the Cannibal's seedy apparel and dirty, unkempt, unshaven appearance.

"Well, I can't say," growled the latter, "that I can pay you any better compliment. Things have gone precious hard with me for sometime past——"

"And with me too," rejoined Mat the Cadger; "particularly since I come into this devil of a country where I can't speak a sentence of the lingo."

But here the conversation was temporarily cut short by the entrance of the waiter, bearing some refreshment which Mat the Cadger had ordered as he passed the bar,—his knowledge of the French tongue being confined to the half-dozen words expressing the articles which he most generally needed—such as bread, meat, brandy, cheese, tobacco, &c. The waiter, whose suspicions had been excited by the appearance of Chiffin, had certainly but little cause to be moved in his favour, when he perceived that he had found a companion—perhaps a friend, and perhaps an accomplice—in the almost equally ill-looking rascal who had last entered. It naturally occurred to the man that the meeting of these two—both being Englishmen, and both being of an evil aspect—was not so accidental as it seemed and as in truth it was: but the thought struck him that they had met at the wine-shop to concoct some villany. Therefore, upon leaving the room, he mentioned his suspicions to the master of the establishment; and this individual thought it prudent to send an intimation to the gendarmes in town, to the effect that two very ill-looking foreigners were at the moment beneath his roof.

Meanwhile Chiffin and Mat the Cadger were discussing their refreshments and continuing their discourse.

"Why, it must be a matter of pretty near eighteen months—at all events fifteen or sixteen," said the Cannibal, "since you and me separated on that night when we were so precious sold in endeavouring to carry off Madge Somers. You jumped out of the window——"

"The best thing I could do," replied Mat. "But what did they do with you? for you never turned up afterwards."

"What did they do?" growled Chiffin; "why, they didn't behave

unhandsome, I must say, considering all circumstances. They packed me off to France; and when I was safe landed at Calais, I had thirty pounds put into my hand. Now you must know that Lord Eagledean had sent to America some time before that, to order a good sum of money to be paid to me if I presented myself in person to receive it. So I was resolved to go over to New York and take possession of the blunt. Well, I got as far as Havre-de-Grace—a place where the packets sail from for America. I took my berth, as a steerage passenger; and as the ship wasn't going to sail for three or four days, I thought I would amuse myself by looking about the town."

"And so you got into some scrape," interjected Mat; "I'll be bound!"

"By Satan, you are just right there!" growled the Cannibal, with a fearfully gloomy look: "and the worse luck for me too. I got blazing drunk at a wine-shop—kicked up a diabolic row—smashed three or four Frenchmen almost to bits—was took before the magistrate—and got sent to quod for six months. There was a pretty start!—or I should say it wasn't any start at all: for the ship sailed without me, as a matter of course—and my passage-money was forfeited."

"Well, that *was* a misfortune," observed the Cadger, as he emptied his glass.

"S I come out of gaol with only about twenty francs in my pocket," resumed the Cannibal: "and what was I to do? I knowed it was no use to write to Lord Eagledean and ask for more money: he had quite enough reason to be sick and tired of me. But I did write to Lady Saxondale and Lord Harold Staunton—and got no answer. I suppose they thought fit to cut their old acquaintance when he was in trouble."

"Very likely," said Mat. "But what have you been doing ever since you came out of gaol?"

"Leading a life that would be hard to give an exact account of," answered Cannibal;—"wandering about like a lost dog—aye, and like a half-starved one too, sometimes—doing a bit of priggling here and highway robbery there—and having a precious lot of very narrow escapes—and in short, dragging on such an existence that I'm uncommon tired of it. Ah! what a fool I have been! The money I have had! the use I might have made of my noble patrons!"—and in desperatio

reference to the question under investigation: her deeper and darker crimes he kept entirely out of view. Dr. Ferney—spirit-broken and crushed, not merely by the recollections of the past, but also by the recent horrors which had occurred at Saxondale House—presented but the ghost of his former self; so that his appearance, and the tale of love's infatuation which he told, won for him a considerable amount of sympathy. As there was not any ground to believe him culpable of a conscious and wilful complicity in the initiation of the imposture twenty-one years back,—but as it was only too evident that his passion had rendered him the weak tool of an artful and designing woman—moreover, as it was through his instrumentality that this imposture was suddenly blazoned forth to the whole world,—it entered not into the mind of any one to proclaim worthy of punishment. When the judgment of the Committee was pronounced, and Lord Saxondale was invited to take his seat amongst the Peers of England—Dr. Ferney, having done all that was required of him, resolved to withdraw completely into private life. He gave up his profession—he quitted his house in Conduit Street—and he retired to the picturesque dwelling at Rhavadergwy in Wales, which the Marquis and Marchioness of Eagledean placed at his disposal. Thither he was accompanied by the faithful and attached Thompson,—on whom Lord Saxondale settled an annuity, so as to relieve him from a complete state of dependence on the physician. No museum, and no laboratory were established at Rhavadergwy: Dr. Ferney had conceived a sudden and unconquerable disgust for all those circumstances and pursuits which could not fail to remind him vividly of the past; and it was in the recreations of literature that the remainder of his days were spent. He lived but three or four years after the occurrences at Saxondale House: his health gradually declined—his constitution, never strong, gave way—and he expired in the arms of the attached Thompson.

The full extent of Lady Saxondale's crimes, as well as those of Lord Harold Staunton, was religiously concealed from our hero and the beautiful Florina. Indeed Lord and Lady Saxondale are now completely happy: their grief for the loss, the one of a mother, the other of a brother, gradually

became attempered down to a pious resignation—until it was absorbed in the elements of felicity with which they were so profusely surrounded. They have four children—two sons and two daughters,—constituting the chief source of their happiness, and in whom are reflected the manly beauty of their father and the feminine graces of their mother.

The Marquis of Eagledean is now in his seventieth year, but as hale and as hearty as when we first introduced him to the reader. There being no heir to his title, the entail of his estates ceases and he is enabled to bequeath them to whomsoever he chooses. Lord and Lady Saxondale, being already immensely rich, require nothing at the old nobleman's hands: it is the same with Lord and Lady Everton—the same too with the Count and Countess of Christoval; and therefore the bulk of the Marquis's property is willed to Mr. and Mrs. Paton, a munificent jointure being reserved for the Marchioness. All those personages whose names have just been mentioned, are as happy as the reader can wish them to be;—and, beyond those petty evils which are incidental to even the most prosperous human condition, no cloud threatens to cast its shadow upon the tenour of their existence.

Juliana—fortunately for herself—became subjected to influences alike corrective and beneficent, when the terrific drama developed its mingled phases of wonderment and horror at Saxondale House. The vigils which she kept by her mother's bedside until almost the last moment, impressed upon her mind the terrors of that death-bed to which guilt had brought her parent; and she was led to deplore her own frailties. Then, on the rightful Lord Saxondale's recovery from his illness, she found herself clasped in the arms of a brother,—a brother who was prepared to receive her as his sister, and to treat her with all the kindness which was characteristic of his nature. The period of mourning for the deceased Lady Saxondale was passed by Juliana at the mansion in Park Lane, with her brother and her sister-in-law; and as it drew towards an end, she received a note from Mr. Forester, respectfully and affectionately worded, soliciting an interview. This she declined, in the belief that he was desirous of drawing her into a renewal of that connexion which had

deal with any body else that there may be."

"All right!" responded Mat. "There's nothing like settling our duties beforehand:"—then as the equipage came in sight, he added quickly, "Yes—it's a pair!"

"And no one on the box!" immediately observed Chiffin. "A light *caleche* too—not more than two travellers inside, I'll be bound. Let's walk slowly on, and seem to be talking, as if we didn't mean mischief."

The chaise came up: the animals were jogging along at the usually miserable pace at which post horses are accustomed to proceed on the French roads; and the postilion, with his great heavy boots, was sitting comfortably enough in his saddle, totally unsuspecting of impending mischief. All in an instant Mat the Cadger sprang at the horse's heads—clutched the reins with one hand—and with the club which he held in the other, struck down the postilion. But the Frenchman was not stunned; and instantaneously springing to his feet, he resolutely and valiantly grappled with the Cadger.

Meanwhile Chiffin had flown to the door of the *caleche*: but just as he tore it open, the traveller inside—for it contained only one gentleman—fired a pistol; and the bullet whisked by the Cannibal's ear. Fearing that there might be a second pistol in readiness, Chiffin threw himself upon the traveller—tore him out of the chaise with the force and fury of a wild beast—and hurled him to the ground. At the same moment the horses, frightened by the disturbance, dashed away; and the hind-wheel of the chaise went completely over the traveller's neck,—break it, so that death was instantaneous.

The horses dashed on; and as the chaise passed away, the shadow which it had thrown upon the ground, disappeared as suddenly from the spot: so that the clear moonlight now streamed full upon the face of the dead traveller. An ejaculation of astonishment burst from the lips of Chiffin: for in that traveller he at once recognised Lord Harold Staunton!

At the same moment the galloping sounds of horses' hoofs were heard approaching from the direction of Varian; and Chiffin flew to the assistance of his comrade, Mat the Cadger, whom the French postilion had flung upon the ground, and on whose breast his knee was placed. The Cannibal's

club dealt the unfortunate post-boys such a tremendous blow as to dash out his brains; and he fell dead upon the spot. The next instant the two ruffians had leapt the hedge which skirted the road, and were flying across the adjacent field. But the comers on horseback,—who, indeed, consisted of a posse of gendarmes,—were not to be thus baulked. They gallantly leapt the hedge, and dashed across the meadow in pursuit of the fugitives.

"We are done for, Mat!" exclaimed Chiffin, "It's the guillotine—or else a resistance unto death!"

"Resistance!" echoed the desperate Cadger: and like two wild beasts at bay, they turned to face the gendarmes.

These,—who were half-a-dozen in number,—called upon them to surrender: but the only answer was a furious attack made by the villains; for they were goaded to mingled frenzy and despair, and they literally sought death. One officer was struck to the ground by a blow of Chiffin's club—another had his arm broken by the Cadger's cudgel: the others closed in around them. But still the two desperate men fought with a valour worthy of a better cause,—until Mat was stricken dead with a blow of a cutlass—and a bullet through the brain ended the iniquitous career of Chiffin the Cannibal.

Lord Harold Staunton's passport told who he was: the report of his death was published in the newspapers, and through this channel shortly came to the knowledge of the Marquis of Eagledean,—who, though he deplored the fate of a young man cut off ere he had time to repent of his manifold sins, was nevertheless relieved from the apprehension of being succeeded in his title and estates by one whose soul was stained with the crime of murder.

CONCLUSION.

No difficulty was experienced in making good the claims of our hero to the title and estates of Saxondale. The subject of those claims was duly investigated by a Committee of Privileges appointed by the House of Lords,—the principal deponents being the Marquis of Eagledean, Dr. Ferney, and Mr. Thompson. The Marquis, while giving his evidence, merely recited so much of the late Lady Saxondale's confession as had in

been cut short by the tragic circumstances at Saxondale House. A few months elapsed, during which Juliana heard no more of Mr. Forester; but at the expiration of that interval, she received a second note, assuring her that the impression her image had left upon his mind, was stronger than he had at first fancied—and he offered her his hand. This she accepted; and her brother, Lord Saxondale, settled upon her an annuity of fifteen hundred a year; so that it proved by no means an ineligible match, in a worldly point of view, for Mr. Forester. But inasmuch as Juliana's character had been too much damaged for her to hope speedily to regain her footing in English society, she and her husband have since their marriage resided abroad—chiefly in Italy; and we are happy in being enabled to add that the lady's conduct has been perfectly and scrupulously correct.

It may easily be supposed that the Marchioness of Villebelle—the beautiful Constance—was perfectly astounded when she learnt that the deceased Edmund was not her brother, but that he whom she had known as William Deveril, stood in this light towards her: and mingled with that wonderment was a profound affliction at the tragic end of her mother. Her husband continued to fill eminent diplomatic situations throughout the reign of Louis-Phillippe, and likewise while the Republic lasted: but when Louis Napoleon usurped the Imperial Crown of France, the high minded Marquis refused to serve under the new dynasty. Fortunately for him, a very distant relative—whom he had not seen and scarcely known for years—died about the same time of that usurpation; and the Marquis found himself the heir to a large fortune. From motives of delicacy,—being unwilling to meet his former wife, if wife she could be called—the Countess of Christoval,—he has visited England rarely; indeed, only for a few weeks at a time, to enable Constance to see her brother and sister-in-law; and now the Marquis and Marchioness are settled down on the handsome estate in the south of France, which formed a portion of his recently acquired inheritance. We must not forget to observe, that Mary-Anne—Constance's faithful lady's-maid—formed an excellent matrimonial alliance. She was one morning combing out her long luxuriant hair before a glass

placed on a toilet-table near the window of her chamber at the mansion of the French Embassy in Madrid,—when she unconsciously became the object of admiration on the part of a middle-aged English gentleman who was lodging at an hotel on the opposite side of the street. The admirer was a bachelor, with a moderate fortune; and he longed for the bliss of matrimony. He soon contrived to form an acquaintance with Mary-Anne—he wooed and won her—and the marriage has been a perfectly happy one, notwithstanding the disparity of some sixteen or seventeen years in their respective ages.

Lord Petersfield paid the debt of nature a few months after the incidents at Saxondale House. He had to be examined as a witness in a law-suit which came under the cognizance of the Court of Queen's Bench; and it is supposed that the exceeding home-thrust questions which the learned counsel put, and which compelled him for once in his life to give point-blank answers, appeared to his mind so utterly destructive of that diplomatic reserve which had become habitual, and so completely subversive of his solemn gravity, as altogether to upset him; and unable to bear up against the shock, he took to his bed—which he never left alive.

Squire Hawkshaw continues unmarried, and is likely to remain so. He is an occasional visitor at the houses of those friends with whom circumstances rendered him so intimate; and he is always a welcome guest.

A few years back, a certain Mark Bellamy was convicted of forgery, before a criminal tribunal at Vienna, and was sentenced to work in the Austrian quicksilver-mines for the remainder of his life. About the same time, Mrs. Martin—another creature of the late Lord Everton, the uncle and persecutor of the present one—died in wretchedness in an English workhouse.

We have now no more to relate. Our task, so far as the present narrative is concerned, has reached its termination. But ere laying down our pen, we invite the attention of our myraids of readers to a Fourth and Concluding Series of "THE MYSTERIES OF THE COURT OF LONDON." 2782

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